

# WHAT STANDS BETWEEN?

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## *What Stands Between?*

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and truth shall make you free."

John 8.31-32

The implications of this verse from God's Holy Word are plain. Our loyalty to Scripture is a condition for three things: discipleship, knowledge of the truth, and freedom. Scripture teaches us that discipleship is the greatest blessing that can come to a person, for it includes forgiveness, salvation, righteousness, and perfect peace on earth and in heaven forever. Knowledge of the truth, as it is discussed in this text, is a knowledge that only God can give. When Jesus says that if we continue in His Word we shall know the truth, He means that we shall know the truth of our own sinfulness, of God's wondrous grace in Christ, of the only way unto eternal life. In fact, apart from the Word we can never know the truth, never know Christ, never be saved, never experience true peace and joy. And finally, if we continue in the Word, by the Word we shall be made free. This is a freedom high above that of the fondest human dreams. This is the freedom in Christ, the freedom from guilt, from sin, from punishment, from Satan, from hell, from the Law. This is a freedom unto God, unto righteousness, unto life everlasting, unto peace and joy in time and eternity. It is a most important thing for us to "continue" in God's Word.

One of the greatest tragedies of our time is the fact that so many millions of people who have had the opportunity to know God's Word are departing from it. But a tragedy far greater is to see whole church denominations turning their back on their only hope, their only treasure, their only reason for existence. American Protestantism, in the main, is a ship without an anchor, for it has cast off the only stabilizing force it could possess, the Word of God. Catholicism, of course, for centuries has tried to operate with human tradition on an equal plane with Scripture. As an organization Catholicism has been a success; as a church it has been almost a total failure. But saddest of all is to see the Lutheran Churches of America departing from the Word. It is true, of course, that many of these Lutherans brought with them from Europe the seeds of their present denials; but it is tragic, nevertheless, to see the churches which call Martin Luther their founder casting off that Word to which Luther was so faithful. The motto of Lutheranism has always been "the Word alone," but in many Lutheran groups in America today that motto is not being followed.

Not only, however, is the Lutheran Church in America troubled by infidelity to Scripture; it is also a divided group. The basic reason for these divisions is that some groups officially and in

actuality do not "continue" in God's Word. Among the several Lutheran groups in America are two of Norwegian extraction, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (formerly the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, hereafter abbreviated "ELC") and the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (hereafter called simply the Norwegian Synod). These two groups have much in common. The present Norwegian Synod is a successor to a much larger body of the same name which in 1917 united with the Hauge's Synod and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, now ELC. Thus the two groups are of common national and historical background. Both claim loyalty to the Word, to the three universal creeds, to Luther's Small Catechism, and to the Augsburg Confession; both use the same hymnbook, often the same catechism; both are located in the same geographical areas. One might well wonder why these two groups do not pool their forces and become one synod. The purpose of this paper is to show that, although there are many surface matters in common, actually there is a great difference between these two bodies which prevents their being in church fellowship. We shall attempt to answer the question: "What stands between" the ELC and the Norwegian Synod? Briefly, there are two reasons which forbid the Norwegian Synod to have church fellowship with the ELC: first, the ELC does not "continue" in God's Word, either in doctrine or in practice; and second, the Norwegian Synod, earnestly endeavoring to "continue" in God's Word, is forbidden by that Word to have fellowship with teachers of false doctrine and those who indulge in loose practice.

## I

### THE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORD

The basic reason for the Norwegian Synod's refusal of the hand of fellowship to the ELC is that the ELC does not "continue" in the Word. This is a serious charge. The ELC fails to "continue" in the Word in two respects: first, it does not maintain faithfully the sole authority and perfect clarity of Scripture; second, it does not teach and practice in accordance with God's authoritative and clear Word. Both the ELC and the Norwegian Synod confess that the Bible is the sole authority for faith and life. This is a good confession, but the ELC does not live up to it, as shall be shown later in this paper. However, there is another point on which almost from the very outset the Norwegian Synod and the ELC disagree; that is, the clarity of the Word of God. The Norwegian Synod along with the entire Synodical Conference has always maintained that the Bible is a clear book, in accordance with such passages as Ps. 119.105, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.", and 2 Pet. 1.19, "We also have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." The ELC, on the other hand, does not maintain that

Scripture is clear. It treats the Bible as an obscure book in which one may find many variant interpretations and uncertain statements. True, the ELC holds to the inspiration of Scripture and claims that Scripture does not contradict itself, but the ELC does not confess that the Word is clear and comprehensible to simple Christians. Actually, the doctrine of verbal inspiration becomes a rather mechanical and unreal thing, if it is defended at the same time that the clarity and, above all, the authority of Scripture are denied. For what is the difference if Scripture is verbally inspired or not, if it is neither clear enough to be understood nor authoritative for all faith and life? This, then, is the basic reason for the Norwegian Synod's refusal of church fellowship to the ELC; the ELC does not uphold the authority and clarity of the Word. The ELC thus does not "continue" in the Word. However, this denial has deeper implications; for the ELC, because of the fact that it does not "continue" in the Word, is plagued with false doctrine and loose practice.

### A. FALSE DOCTRINE

#### The Madison Settlement in 1917

A great deal has been spoken and written concerning the history of the ELC, especially in regard to the theological controversies. For anyone interested in reading the history of these controversies and learning wherein the different parties either "continued" in or rejected God's Word, we would refer him to the publication of the Norwegian Synod, written on the occasion of its ninetieth anniversary in 1943, entitled "Grace for Grace." We wish to mention only one historical document to point up the unscriptural position of the ELC, for this document to this day is the basis of the ELC. We are speaking of the Madison Settlement of 1912, which formed the basis for the union in 1917 of the former Norwegian Synod, Hauge's Synod, and the United Church. The Madison Settlement was drawn up in an attempt to settle the controversy on Predestination which had continued from about 1876 between the Norwegian Synod on the one hand and the groups later comprising the United Church on the other. Actually the Madison Settlement had to include far more than the doctrine of Predestination, for it is impossible to discuss this teaching without considering such cardinal doctrines as Conversion, the Will of man, original sin, and even Justification. The Madison Settlement, as its name implies, was frankly and admittedly a compromise.

#### The Madison Settlement in 1948

The Rev. S. Gunderson, one of the framers of the Madison Settlement, said, "The United Church has not changed a tittle of its doctrine, neither has the Synod. The Madison Settlement is a compromise." This statement was made in 1913, but lest anyone believe that the position of the ELC has changed in the past thirty-five years we quote from the "Lutheran Herald," official publication of the ELC, for May 18, 1948, p. 504, "When our Union Documents are termed 'compromises,' the expression is apt; one will search the record in vain to find that one party or another 'gave in.' The

negotiators simply learned that the differences were not breaches of the unity of the faith, that a unity of faith had, in fact, been present all the time." To show the nature of this "unity of faith," we quote from the same issue of the "Lutheran Herald" a few words by the Rev. J. E. Jorgensen, one of the framers of the Madison Settlement, "During the discussion (in preparation of the Madison Settlement), it was revealed that the opinion was held by some that man's spiritual condition before conversion is that he is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins; and by others that he is not exactly dead but rather in a kind of neutral state, so that he is yet able to make his choice by his own power, between the way of life and the way of eternal damnation. (Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.')

"It was found that another group agreed that sinful, unconverted man would eventually make such choice, but only after he received a new heart and had because a new creature, the workmanship of God the Holy Spirit. Thus what power of choice he would then have would be the gift of God and nothing of his own natural sinful power . . . The writer of these lines is glad, and gives thanks to God, when he notes that our church now, both in teaching and preaching, is holding fast to the Articles of Union (including the Madison Settlement), as is also the case at the theological seminaries."

It should be clear to the most unobserving reader that the ELC has compromised the Word of God. We ask, who has given the ELC the right to compromise on any point of God's Word? Because the doctrine of Predestination is not preached every Sunday (although there are at least thirteen preicope texts in the three series used by the ELC which deal directly with the doctrine of Predestination, and many other texts in the same series which lend themselves to a discussion of the doctrine) makes it neither unimportant nor non-divisive of church fellowship. If God considers a matter important enough to reveal it to us through His Word, we certainly ought to consider the matter important enough not to make it a matter of indifference.

The Madison Settlement, as shown above, settled nothing. The ELC has always called this document "the Madison Agreement," but in the "Lutheran Herald" for May 18, 1948, p. 509, the ELC confesses that the term "Madison Agreement" is "a somewhat unfortunate translation of the Norwegian. The word 'Settlement' is a far more accurate translation of the Norwegian word 'Opgjør' than is 'Agreement.'" This document simply declared that a member of the ELC can believe one of two "forms" on the doctrine of Predestination. One can either hold to the Scriptural teaching that God has predestinated us in Christ from the foundation of the world without any cause in us, His own grace and the merit of Christ being the sole causes; or he can believe that there is a third cause, namely man's faith which God foresaw in eternity and as a result of which He determined to save man. This second "form" or view is unscriptural and anti-scriptural, for it makes man's

faith a cause of his predestination, a teaching contrary to Scripture. Furthermore, the Madison Settlement opens the door to other false doctrines. Thus it is clear that the ELC officially refuses to "continue" in God's Word. The sole authority of Scripture is set aside, when a man-made document is given equal authority with it. Is there any essential difference between this setting aside of the Word and that of the Popes? The authority of Scripture, and along with it the clarity of the Word, have been sacrificed on the altar of human compromise in the very foundation of the ELC.

But there are those in our time who are saying that the fears of the men who mistrusted the Madison Settlement in 1917, and especially of those who remained outside the union of 1917 to form the present Norwegian Synod, were unfounded. The very up-to-date pronouncements in the "Lutheran Herald" should show anyone that the ELC stands exactly where it did in 1917, giving room for truth and error. However, in addition to the official stand of the ELC in the Madison Settlement there are two other courses open to us to determine what the ELC actually teaches and believes. First, we can investigate the teachings at the seminary of the ELC, teachings which will be held, as they have in the past, by a majority of the students: and, second, we can see what is tolerated and made room for within the church itself. If a doctrine is taught at the seminary contrary to God's Word, if the clergy of the synod is informed, and if no synodical action is taken, we can with fairness assume either that the majority of the clergy agree with the doctrine, or that it is indifferent to the truth. In either event the course of action is unscriptural. We shall now proceed to a discussion of the false doctrines taught at the seminary of the ELC and tolerated within the synod at large. We wish to make two points in passing: All errors of the ELC, as taught at its seminary, can be documented by personal class notes of the writer or by testimony of pastors in the ELC; furthermore, the most serious of these errors have been reported to the entire clergy of the ELC with no action as yet taken to correct them.

### Conversion

The most serious aberration from the truth concerns the doctrine of conversion by grace alone. "Conversion . . . is the work of God by which man is, through the Gospel, transferred from a state of sin and wrath and spiritual death, in which by nature all men are, into a state of spiritual life and faith and grace in which alone the sinner can enjoy the benefits of Christ's redemption." (A. L. Graebner, *Doctrinal Theology*, St. Louis, 1910) The seminary of the ELC, however, teaches that conversion is not entirely a work of God, but that man also has some share; and this teaching is permitted by the Madison Settlement, as the above-quoted statement of the Rev. J. E. Jorgensen testifies.

Since the error of the ELC concerning the doctrine of Conversion affects many other teachings, it is good to give a brief summary of the position of the ELC, showing why this error arises. The prime thesis on which the doctrine of the ELC is built is that

God will not violate man's personality. At first glance this statement seems perfectly harmless, for none of us believes in irresistible grace, and we all believe that man is not coerced but rather graciously drawn in conversion. We all agree that natural man has a personality, and that God works upon it. We agree that in conversion man is conscious and experiences many emotions. But sin has corrupted human personality, and thus human personality has been violated. God did not do this, but nevertheless the human personality is not what it should be. In philosophical circles it is claimed as impossible to conceive of a human personality without the power of free choice, for, it is claimed, the essence of human personality is free choice. This is fine philosophy, but poor theology; but the ELC has approached the whole subject from a philosophical rather than a theological and Biblical standpoint. The reasoning of the ELC is about as follows: Since we all agree that man always has the power to reject grace both before and after conversion (this is Scriptural), then it must logically (but, we add, not Scripturally) follow, that man also has the power to accept grace. Again, this is good logic, but poor theology, for the Bible teaches that man possesses the power only to reject. Scripture says in Rom. 8.7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." To remain within the pale of the Lutheran Church, these teachers must admit that unregenerate man does not have free choice, which is always claimed for the inviolate personality; for in Luther's Explanation to the Third Article, which the ELC accepts, we read, "I cannot of my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel." This forces these teachers to put in another step, namely, that God gives powers through the Call, by which man may exercise free choice, and thus decide for or against Christ. Thus, they believe they have taught both the Scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace alone, since these powers are imparted by grace, and also that they have preserved man's personality inviolate. However, like all other doctrines of God's Word, conversion cannot be logically expained. The term "by grace alone" is bandied about very freely, but in actuality it is denied.

In order to describe the position of the ELC in greater detail, we shall cite one or two analogies which have been used at the seminary of the ELC to illustrate the doctrine of conversion. Man is described as being sick and on an operating table. God is a doctor who tells him that he is sick and needs an operation. Man refuses to cooperate, but gradually, through the enlightenment of the Gospel, he is given powers enabling him to cease resisting and finally to say, "Go ahead, God, and operate." At this point conversion occurs. A second analogy describes God as a vacuum cleaner salesman who approaches man, the sinner in need of conversion. Salvation is the vacuum cleaner. God begins his sales talk through the Word, but man at first is disinterested. Gradually, however, through the so-called Enlightenment period, man ceases to put up arguments and finally signs on the dotted line. He is converted. Both of these analogies show that in the final analysis conversion

and salvation depend upon man, for unless he makes an actual decision, he cannot be saved. Man is thus the deciding cause of his own conversion. Of course, all analogies break down, but as see above, the teaching at the ELC seminary is in accord with these analogies.

The first fault in the teaching of the ELC is that it is completely unscriptural. There is nothing in the Bible which even remotely suggests that we convert ourselves by imparted powers. The second error in the approach of the ELC is that it takes away the glory from God and gives it to man, for man is regarded as the deciding cause. And the fact that the ELC claims that its teaching gives all glory to God in no way makes any difference, for when man is the deciding cause, he deserves much glory. But God's Word says, Eph. 2.8, "**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.**" This one verse of Scripture refutes both errors of the ELC, for by the words "**and that not of yourselves**" it shows that from first to last salvation is a work of God without the least co-operation by man. And this verse gives all the glory to God by the words "**For by grace are ye saved**" and "**it is the gift of God.**" Our Confessions likewise declare clearly the glorious truth of the Word: "And it is nevertheless true that man before his conversion is still a rational creature, having an understanding and will; however, not an understanding with respect to divine things, or a will to will something good and salutary. Yet he can do nothing whatever towards his conversion, and is in this respect much worse than a stone and block; for he resists the Word and will of God, until God awakens him from the death of sin, enlightens and renews him." Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. II, 59.

In connection with the doctrine of Conversion the ELC teaches erroneously also on what is called the "Enlightenment period." We are all agreed that in the conversion of a sinner there are certain preparatory activities. God approaches man with the Law to convict of sin and with the Gospel to convert men. But Rom. 8.7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and I Cor. 2.14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them," both show that until the moment of conversion man is opposed to God. There is no such thing as an Enlightenment period or intermediate state between spiritual life and spiritual death, any more than there is such a state between physical life and death. Christ says, "He that is not with me is against me." Matt. 12.30, Luke 11.23. This teaching of the ELC is simply another method of trying to abide by Scripture and yet make room for reason. The result is that reason is satisfied, but Scripture goes abegging. The above should suffice to show that the ELC does not maintain the sole authority of Scripture, for it seeks to accomodate itself to reason, which in this case is contrary to Scripture. Likewise, the clarity of the Bible is denied, for passages which are perfectly clear and which plainly apply to the issue are either declared unclear or inappropriate.



## The Will

So closely related to Conversion as to be almost a part of it is the doctrine of the Will of man. History has shown that it is practically impossible for one to teach error on the doctrine of Conversion and truth on the doctrine of the Will. The ELC at its seminary teaches that man's will is freed before conversion, thus enabling him to choose for or against Christ. This has been mentioned previously in connection with the discussion of the inviolate personality of man, but it deserves amplification. At the seminary of the ELC, it has been stated with all seriousness that man has two wills, the *voluntas* and the *arbitrium*, one of which is freed by the Call, before conversion, to enable man to choose Christ, the other remaining bound and manifesting itself in original sin. But Scripture plainly teaches that natural man is not such a free-agent personality as the ELC claims he is, for his will in spiritual things is bound before conversion. If man were a free-agent personality, he would no longer be a hopelessly lost sinner in need of God's boundless grace. The Fall has ruined man's personality by binding his will toward all that is evil. Scripture says, Eph. 4.17, "They (the unregenerate) walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Rom. 3.11-12. The Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. 11, 12 says, "Therefore the Scriptures deny to the intellect, heart, and will of the natural man all aptness, skill, capacity, and ability to think, to understand, to be able to do, to begin, to will, to undertake, to act, to work or to concur in working anything good and right in spiritual things as of himself."

As a further instance of error on the part of the ELC in regard to the doctrine of the Will, we might mention a class-room discussion which occurred in connection with the passage in the Formula of Concord where it is stated that man's will remains passive in conversion. This is one of the strongest statements in the Confessions against synergism or co-operation, yet it was twisted in such a way as to make room for the error of synergism. In Thor. Decl. II, 89 we read, "So also when Luther says that with respect to his conversion man is pure passive (purely passive), that is, does nothing whatever towards it, but only suffers what God works in him, his meaning is . . . that man of himself, or from his natural powers, cannot do anything or help towards his conversion, and that conversion is not only in part, but altogether, an operation, gift, and present, and work of the Holy Ghost alone, who accomplishes and effects it by His power and might, through the Word, in the intellect, will and heart of man . . . while man does or works nothing, but only suffers." It should be clear from the above that Luther is here not teaching that man by suffering the Holy Ghost to work on him is doing something of his own will or ceasing to resist the Holy Ghost. It is plain that this passage simply means, as is said

in the next paragraph of the Formula of Concord, that the will of man is merely the "**Subjectum convertendum**," "that which is to be converted." But this passage was twisted to mean that even the Formula of Concord left the door open to allow man a small part in his conversion. This whole teaching of the ELC in regard to the Will of man is rationalistic and unscriptural. It indicates the position which reason holds as over against the Scripture. The Word, thus, in the ELC is not authoritative, but reason is.

### Original Sin

Closely related to the doctrine of Conversion and the Will is the doctrine of **Original Sin**. Again at this point the synergistic teaching of the ELC has perverted the authority and clarity of the Word. Since the ELC insists upon man's self-determination in Conversion and the freedom of his will in the unregenerate state, it naturally follows that natural man cannot be quite as depraved and wicked as we Lutherans have been wont to describe him. The special point on which the ELC teaches erroneously in regard to the doctrine of Original Sin is that it denies that unconverted man is spiritually dead. With the synergistic view of the ELC it would be impossible for unregenerate man to be totally dead, since then a dead man could co-operate in his resurrection. But, they reason, if man is totally dead, then the reason that one is saved and another lost must lie in God Who raises one through the Gospel and allows another to continue on in death. However, they have determined *a priori* that man, not God, is the reason that one is saved and another lost. Thus it is absolutely essential, to the ELC, that the term "dead in trespasses and sins," as it is taught in Eph. 2.1; 2.5; and Col. 2.13, be softened to some extent. The statement from the Rev. J. E. Jorgensen also showed this fact. At the seminary of the ELC the students are taught that man is not really "dead" spiritually but only "under the sentence of death" or "asleep." Of course, a man "under the sentence of death" is still alive, and if his sentence were commuted he might go on to live for many years.

Scripture has thus been altered to make man an entirely different creature from what the Bible plainly declares him to be; certainly an arbitrary alteration. Then all the terms in the Bible which refer to conversion as rebirth, John 3; as quickening, Eph. 2; as creation, Col. 2, really only mean, by this method of thinking, a release from prison, but not a giving of new life or a resurrection from the dead. We are constrained to ask, was the Holy Ghost so limited in vocabulary that He was unable to distinguish between "dead" and "under the sentence of death?" What becomes of the authority of God's inspired Word, if we must now undertake to say what the Holy Ghost meant? Where is the clarity of Scripture, if the book is so dark that when it means to say "under the sentence of death," the best it can do is to say "dead?" And how can we be sure of anything in the Bible if the book is so inaccurately written? God's Word with its authority and clarity has been sacrificed in favor of human reason. But God says, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

Even if it conflicts with our reason to say so, we must confess that natural man is "dead in trespasses." That is the Scriptural doctrine of Original Sin. Our Confessions say the same: Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. II, 11, "Now, just as a man who is physically dead cannot of his own powers prepare or adapt himself to obtain temporal life again, so man who is spiritually dead in sins cannot of his own strength adapt or apply himself to the acquisition of spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life, unless he is delivered and quickened by the Son of God from the death of sin." But the Rev. Jorgenson has assured us that some of the framers of the Madison Settlement did not think that man was totally dead spiritually.

The clear-cut denial of the Scripture by the ELC demonstrates the terrible effect which comes from approaching theology with a preconceived notion. Scripture leaves us with many mysteries, and we must be content to let them remain as such. In regard to this whole subject the ELC teaches error because it begins with a subjective opinion, instead of letting God tell us how much and what He wants us to know. There is a whole host of Scripture passages arrayed against the synergism of the ELC, but because of the purely philosophical and psychological premise that man's personality cannot be violated, these Scripture truths are swept aside, and man is declared able to co-operate in conversion, to possess a free will and spiritual life before conversion. Such is the course of those who reject the authoritative and clear Word of God.

#### Predestination

And now we come to the greatest example of synergistic presumption in the ELC, that a man is responsible for his own **Predestination**. This doctrine has been discussed earlier in connection with the Madison Settlement. The issue is simply this: Is predestination dependent upon anything that God foresees in man or not? The ELC, along with a great part of American Lutheranism, teaches that God predestinates us in view of the faith which in eternity He foresees we will possess in time. The ELC in the Madison Settlement officially "without reservation, accepts that doctrine of election which is set forth in . . . Pontoppidan's Truth unto Godliness (Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed), question 548, the so-called Second Form of Doctrine." Question 548 of Pontoppidan's work reads as follows: "What is Election? Answer: God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ, and remain constant in this faith unto the end." Placing God's foreseeing of faith before His election or predestination makes man's foreseen faith a cause of predestination. This, of course, is synergistic, for according to Scripture grace always precedes man's faith, and not vice versa. The ELC also at its seminary teaches predestination in view of faith, and it is safe to say that fully 75% of the clergy of that body adhere to this view.

The first error involved in the position of the ELC is that God's foreknowledge is confused with His predestination. The Formula

of Concord long ago settled this question, but it continually arises. Of course, God knows who shall eventually be saved and lost, but that fact is entirely separate and distinct from His decree of predestination. His foreknowledge extends to all people, but His predestination applies only to the beloved children of God and has no connection with those who are lost. We do not believe the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation, because God's Word does not teach it. On the other hand, for the same reason, we do not believe in predestination in view of faith. Scripture assigns only two reasons for our predestination, the grace of God and the merit of Christ. The ELC claims that it only assigns these two reasons too, but the statement from Pontoppidan and the use of the term "in view of faith" show that whether they admit it or not, they have made faith a cause of predestination. Especially when considered in the light of its synergism on Conversion, the teaching of the ELC in regard to the doctrine of Predestination is a completely synergistic teaching. Since the ELC is not content to leave as a mystery the question of why one is converted and another lost, it is also not content to leave as a mystery the question why one is predestinated to salvation and another not. And in solving these insoluble problems, as true synergists, they teach that the answer lies in man.

Scripture says, 2 Tim. 1.9, that God "hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," Eph. 1.4-5, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will;" and Eph. 1.11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." The Formula of Concord says, Thor. Decl. XI, 5, "The eternal election of God, however, that is, God's ordination to salvation, does not extend at once over the godly and the wicked, but only over the children of God, who were elected and ordained to eternal life before the foundation of the world was laid, as Paul says, Eph. 1.4-5." Again we see that the ELC has set aside the authority and clarity of God's Word to favor a human notion. The ELC has refused to leave as a mystery that which Scripture makes a mystery. It has made man's faith a cause of his predestination, an idea which is totally foreign to Scripture; and it has accommodated its synergistic reason by making faith precede predestination, just as in conversion it has made man's decision precede faith, a free will precede conversion, spiritual life precede regeneration. In other words, throughout the whole doctrine of salvation man always takes the lead, and God with His grace has followed. There is only one name for such rationalizing, synergism.

#### **Justification—Faith a Gift**

We come next to a doctrine which is closely related to the foregoing, a doctrine which is the very heart of our Christian faith, **Justification**. It seems unbelievable that a church body which calls

itself Lutheran could be in error on this teaching which became the salvation of Martin Luther. And yet much of American Lutheranism, including the ELC, is in error on this central truth. Of course, it goes without saying that anyone who consistently teaches a synergistic doctrine of Conversion will teach erroneously on Justification, for a synergist makes faith something meritorious and a work of man, notwithstanding his protests to the contrary. But besides this, the error of the ELC is two-fold. The first error stems directly from its synergistic concept of Conversion. Scripture teaches that faith is a gift of God. This is entirely in accordance with the idea of salvation by grace alone, for, obviously, faith as a part of salvation then also is a gift of God's grace. In Eph. 2.8 the Holy Ghost tells us, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."; and in Phil. 1.29 He says, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." But at the seminary of the ELC the students are taught that faith is **not** a gift of God. To call faith a gift would militate against the notion of man's inviolate personality, and this the synergistic teaching of the seminary of the ELC will not tolerate. The question is asked, "Is faith a **quantum** which can be given?" The answer, of course, at the seminary is that faith is not a **quantum**, and hence cannot be given. But Scripture and the Confessions, despite the rationalizing of the ELC, tell us that faith is given. It borders on the ridiculous to treat such flights of imagination seriously, but it is a sad fact that the majority of seminary students and pastors in the ELC seem to regard all this as entirely within the pale of Biblical Christianity. It is simply another plank in the structure of a theological system which uses the terminology of Scripture but denies the authority and clarity thereof.

#### Objective Justification

The second error of the ELC in regard to the doctrine of Justification is a denial of the teaching of Objective Justification. The ELC has to confess faith in objective **reconciliation**, for in 2 Cor. 5.19 we read, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." But when reading this verse the ELC makes a purely philosophic distinction between reconciliation and justification. But what is the essential difference? Can we be reconciled and still not be justified? This is a mere quibbling over terms. Furthermore, the Scripture settles the problem completely in Rom. 4.25, saying "Christ was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Just as Christ was delivered for the offense of all, so he was raised again for the justification of all. And in Rom. 5.18-19 the last vestige of doubt is removed; "Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon **all men** to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon **all men** unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." The Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod sums up this teaching thus: "Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be right-

eous in Christ; Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 4:25." Again we are constrained to say that the above treatment of clear Scripture shows the attitude of the ELC toward God's Holy Word.

#### **Conversion After Death**

Thus far we have had as our purpose to show how the ELC denies the authority and clarity of God's Word by its erroneous and rationalistic teaching concerning the doctrine of salvation. However, while this is certainly the most serious and far-reaching error, it is by no means the only one. Another teaching which is presented at the seminary of the ELC, which has been reported to the entire clergy of the synod, and which has found some credence among the clergy, is the belief in the opportunity for the conversion of the heathen after death. At the root of this error is the same old synergistic idea of the inviolability of human personality. The line of argument is as follows: Since man's personality cannot be violated, and since obviously many men die without the chance of either accepting or rejecting Christ, there must be a chance in the hereafter. Again, this is poor theology. For Scripture could hardly be clearer on anything than it is on the fact that there is no chance after death. In Luke 16:23 we are informed that "there is a great gulf fixed," so that one cannot pass from hell to heaven. In Heb. 9:27 we are told that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Nothing is said in this verse or elsewhere that would indicate that man has a chance either to hear the Gospel or be converted after death. To build a doctrine on the silence of Scripture is certainly a poor way to handle the Word. 2 Cor. 5:10 states: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body." The only conclusion we can draw from this verse is that judgment is to be made on the basis of this life, and after this life the chance for changing the judgment of Christ has passed. Need we say more to illustrate the completely antisciptural nature of the teaching of the ELC? And does this not demonstrate forcibly the terrible consequences of approaching the study of God's Word with preconceived notions? Here again reason sets aside the clarity and authority of the Word.

#### **Hades**

Closely related to the above the erroneous teaching that the souls of the departed do not go directly to heaven or to hell but to some intermediate state. This error is based on a faulty handling of certain verses of Scripture. It is claimed that there is a distinction between the words **Hades** and **Gehenna** in the original language. A careful study shows that this is a non-existent distinction; and that the souls of the departed, except for the fact that they are not as yet united with the bodies, are in the same state as they will be through all eternity. This point to some may seem to be a quibbling over words, but again the clarity and authority of God's Word are at stake. Nothing in Scripture is unimportant.

#### **Millennialism**

Another error tolerated within the ELC is **Pre-millennialism**.

It is impossible within the scope of this paper to describe the various flights of fancy which pass for Scriptural truth in regard to this doctrine, for almost all Pre-millennialists have some particular peculiarity. Suffice it to say that in the past there have been at least two teachers at the ELC seminary who have propounded Pre-millennialism. A prominent pastor of the ELC gave a series of broadcasts on the subject, in which he favored this unscriptural teaching. The Lutheran Bible Institute of Minneapolis, a school which educates many pastors and missionaries of the ELC, has pre-millennialists on its staff, and there are any number of pastors in parishes of the ELC who believe and teach this unscriptural doctrine. In brief, Pre-millennialism may be defined as a literalistic use of the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation, involving the idea that Christ will return to reign visibly on earth for a thousand years before Judgment Day. The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament clearly show that the language of Revelation on this point as well as on many others is figurative, apocalyptic language and was never intended to be taken literally. Pre-millennialism itself is a confession of the wrong use of Scripture with special error on the matter of the clarity of the Word. When a church body arbitrarily makes this teaching an open question and allows its members to believe and teach whatever they please, that church body demonstrates that in its opinion Scripture is neither clear nor authoritative. Such a church body is the ELC.

#### Antichrist

Still another error which often involves a study of the last things is the doctrine of the Antichrist. Actually this doctrine does not involve a study of the last things only, for the Antichrist of 2 Thess. 2 is present with us today too; but many see the Antichrist as some character arising shortly before the end of the world. Scripture plainly teaches in 2 Thess. 2 that the Pope at Rome is and will remain the Antichrist. Likewise, our Confessions are entirely clear on this matter, Schmalkald Articles, Part II, Art. IV, 10. But there does not seem to be a single seminary professor in the ELC who believes that the Pope is the Antichrist, and the number of pastors who do so is negligible. Here again the authority and clarity of Scripture are denied in the ELC.

#### Creation

In regard to the doctrine of creation the ELC also teaches erroneously. At the seminary the students are taught that the term "day" as used in Gen. 1 refers to a long period of time and not to the calendar day. The students are taught that theistic evolution is a perfectly plausible and acceptable theory. But a study of Gen. 1 should be enough to convince anyone that the clear and natural meaning of "day" is a normal calendar day. Any other interpretation is strained and out of harmony with the text. Why then do they teach a longer creation period? Because they wish to accommodate themselves to the prevailing scientific views and theories. When Scripture and Science disagree, Science is wrong. Here again is a simple example of setting aside the clear and authoritative Word and placing human reason in its place.

## Progressive Revelation

The students at the seminary of the ELC are also taught the false doctrine known as Progressive Revelation. This teaching maintains that the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets had little or no knowledge of a personal Messiah, of the Holy Ghost, or of the Trinity. Furthermore, progressive revelation teaches that these Old Testament characters were saved not by faith in Christ, but by faith in the power of God. This is a clear denial of the scriptural doctrine that there is salvation in Christ alone, for if the people in the Old Testament era could be saved without faith in Christ, what is to prevent people in our era from being saved in the same manner? It is especially strange that this view is held in the ELC, because those who are most eager in propounding it are just as eager to disavow any doctrine of inspiration which makes the writers of Scripture mere secretaries of the Holy Ghost. Thus, according to those who hold to Progressive Revelation, David must have been very confused when he wrote, Ps. 110.1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." For David here speaks of two people called "Lord," but we know that David, the mightiest ruler of Israel, called only God "Lord." Thus David must either have been speaking of a conversation between the Father and the Son, as the New Testament in at least six places interprets the verse, or else he did not know what he was talking about. When Paul tells us in so many places that Abraham was saved by faith, Paul is referring to faith in Christ; otherwise the force of his whole argument would fall flat. When Jesus says that Abraham rejoiced to see his day, John 8.56, there was more than simply the belief in God's ability to save in that rejoicing; there was the clear foreknowledge of Christ given by God, so beautifully described in Heb. 11. Even the Jews to whom Jesus was talking understood Him to be referring to a personal meeting for they said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old and hast thou seen Abraham?" And Jesus answers in the affirmative, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

We have another sample of progressive revelation theology in a series in the "Lutheran Herald" by Doctor Jacob Tanner, professor emeritus at Luther Theological Seminary. In the "Lutheran Herald" for Sept. 27, 1949, Dr. Tanner says, "God's self-revelation was accomplished through a historical process of a progressive character. God did not reveal Himself like a flash of lightning. The truth at first was presented in an embryonic condition and in temporary clothing; and little by little it was unfolded by additions, enlarging the truth and furnishing new light for faith and life. This unfolding continued until God's self-revelation was completed in Jesus Christ. Genesis 3.15 contains the promise of the coming of Christ, but in an embryonic form. It is true as far as it goes, but it needed the full unfolding that we can trace through the Old Testament, and the completion in Christ Himself, in order to bring out its full, hidden content . . . The capacity for receiving and using the added knowledge would increase as the knowledge that was already received was being used. Thus God would add



that would enable those that had it to make a saving use of God's final revelation in Christ. (emphasis ours). Cf. Rom. 4.3.

"The Bible cannot be separated from God's progressive self-revelation. God's revelation of Himself unto man's salvation produced the Bible."

One cannot escape the impression from reading Dr. Tanner's words that the theory of evolution has unduly influenced him. He seems to regard the people of the Old Testament era as lacking the "capacity for receiving and using" the full revelation of God. Where in Scripture does he find this teaching? It is true that God chose not to send His Son into the world at once after the fall. It is true that the believers of the Old Testament era did not have all of the knowledge that we Christians of the New Testament era have. Dr. Tanner speaks as if the believers of the Old Testament times were inferior in intellect and spiritual understanding to those of New Testament times. It is true, of course, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him;" but there is nothing in Scripture to show that the Old Testament believers were spiritually weaker and had less capacity than these New Testament Christians. Else why are the New Testament believers pointed to the wonderful examples of faith in Heb. 11, where the faith of the believers in the Old Testament era is described? According to Dr. Tanner and those who follow his teachings, the New Testament Christian is exhorted to look to men with less capacity and weaker faith than himself for strength and encouragement in his Christian life.

One cannot read Dr. Tanner's series without being struck at once by the similarity of his ideas to those of Dr. Reu of a decade ago, as shown in his "What Is Scripture?". Therein Dr. Reu over-emphasizes the human side of Scripture with an invitation to numberless errors regarding the historicity, scientific accuracy, and geographical exactness of Scripture. Space does not permit pointing out the similarities in detail, except to mention that both Dr. Tanner and Dr. Reu appear to confuse Revelation and Inspiration, both emphasize the notion of development and gradual nature of this Revelation, and both thereby play into the hands of the evolutionistic theories so rampant in our day. In the negotiations between the Ameriman Lutheran Church, represented by Dr. Reu and the Missouri Synod, the essential difference in the position regarding Scripture held by the two groups became most evident in Dr. Reu's refusal to accept unqualifiedly the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod and in the final cessation of negotiations between the two groups largely over this point. As far as we can determine, Dr. Tanner is in almost complete agreement with the teachings of Dr. Reu.

#### Other Teachings

And finally we come to some teachings which do not necessarily destroy any doctrine of the faith, but which amount to a denial of the clarity of Scripture on the part of the ELC. The students at the seminary of the ELC are taught that the account of Joshua and the stopping of the sun in Josh. 10.12-14, is poetry, not history.

They are taught that Paul in Rom. 7.15-25 is speaking of an unregenerate man, an interpretation which is counter both to the analogy of Scripture, to the Lutheran Confessions, and to the interpretations of nearly every Christian commentator on the Bible. They are taught that John 3.5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," does not apply to Christian Baptism, a view which does much to destroy the importance of Baptism, a view which certainly renders Scripture an unclear book. They are taught that the "judgment" which comes as a result of unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 11.25, is only a physical, not a spiritual judgment. These are some so-called exegetical points on which the ELC is in error. They show that the authority and clarity of Scripture are denied.

## B. LOOSE PRACTICE

Having discussed the doctrinal aberrations of the ELC, and having endeavored to show that these errors arise out of a fundamental disloyalty to the Word of God, which is manifested primarily in a denial of the authority and clarity of Scripture, we now turn to the second result of this failure to "continue" in the Word; namely, to the instances of loose practice in the ELC. Disloyalty to the Word and false doctrine invariably produce loose practice.

### Synodical Discipline

The first kind of loose practice to result from a faulty attitude toward the Word is the neglect of church discipline on the congregational level and of synodical discipline on the level of the church at large. The ELC has succumbed to the temptation toward loose synodical discipline in regard both to doctrinal and moral lapses on the part of pastors in the group. Although the entire clergy, and especially the Church Council of the ELC, have been informed of the major part of the errors listed above, there is to date no evidence that anything has been done to correct the situation by way of a public retraction or correction. We trust that something has been done privately. There is perhaps no point in piling up a list of examples of lack of synodical discipline in the ELC. Let it suffice to say that both doctrinal and moral offenders have gone undisciplined in many instances. It may be argued that a synod is not a divine institution, and therefore that the rules for church discipline laid down in Mt. 18 do not apply to a synod. But we will all agree that a synod ought most certainly be an outward expression of an inward fellowship. The adherence to the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as confessions make a synod a confessional group in which it is expected that the members subscribe to and teach according to these confessions because they are in accord with the Word of God. And yet the confessions are violated on every hand and at the very heart of the ELC, at its seminary. But no synodical discipline is invoked, for it has completely broken down in the ELC. But God's Word says, I Cor. 1.10, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind."

and in the same judgment." Synodical discipline is in accord with God's Word. Failure to administer it is a sin. The ELC does not heed God's command, but does as it wishes. And it wishes only peace. The president of the seminary told this writer that the church was "big enough" for these various differences of opinion and tendencies. Synodical discipline is practically passe in the ELC.

### **Lodgery**

With the failure of a synod to "continue" in God's Word and with its failure to practice synodical discipline all kinds of looseness arise. One of the most insidious and difficult symptoms of this looseness is **lodgery**. The ELC is filled with lodge members of every kind and description. By God's grace there still are a few pastors in the group who try to take a confessional stand, but the great majority are disinclined either to keep lodge members from joining their congregations or to do much to get church members to give up their lodge membership. It is safe to say that there is hardly a single large city church and very few small town churches in the ELC, which do not have at least a sprinkling of lodge members. Some congregations are known to have specified when calling a man as pastor that he is never to appose the lodge. In January, 1949, Dr. O. G. Malmin, Editor of the "Lutheran Herald", official organ of the ELC, before a congregation of his church body criticized the Norwegian Synod (and thus the entire Synodical Conference) for being "so narrow that they do not allow women to vote or lodge member in their churches." The students at the ELC seminary are taught that they should discuss lodge membership with church members and prospects, and then allow the individual to decide whether with good conscience he can belong to both church and lodge. If the individual decides that he can conscientiously belong to both, the pastor should drop the matter. Thus the conscience becomes the supreme authority, and God's Word which tells us not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers," 2 Cor. 6.14, is no longer the sole authority for faith and life.

### **Deistic Societies**

The ELC takes no definite stand against deistic Veterans' organizations and Scouting, which are closely related to lodgery. The average pastor has no idea that these organizations have anything about them which is contrary to God's Word, although their ignorance is certainly no excuse, for even a sketchy study of the principles of these groups should show their essentially deistic nature. It is quite common for an ELC pastor to act as chaplain for a national Veterans' organization or a mixed Scout group. A pastor of the ELC recently served as National Chaplain for the American Legion, and he had as one of his publicly stated purposes an attempt to make the Legion a more religious organization. The "Lutheran Herald" every month devotes some space to the subject of church-sponsored Scout troops and Scout work. Not only are pastors who work with such groups involved in a deistic religion but also they are often involved in the grossest kind of unionism, both of which are forbidden in God's Word. The above-quoted passage from 2

Cor. 6.14, applies to every organization in which a religious creed or subscription is required, but in which the names of the Trinity and of Christ are, as a matter of principle, omitted. And such a passage as Rom. 16.17 or 1 Cor. 1.10 forbids unionistic prayer and worship with members of heterodox churches, even if they do confess faith in the Trinity and in Christ as Saviour. This confessional looseness is simply another of a long list of indications that the ELC does not have fidelity to the Word as its chief objective.

#### **Other Practices**

On such matters as funerals, baptisms, communion, and other pastoral functions, it is difficult to make any sweeping statements in regard to the practice of the ELC. But it has been this writer's experience, albeit limited to the area of the Twin Cities, that the pastors of the ELC are far more liberal than Scriptural practice allows, particularly with regard to Communion.

#### **Women in the Church**

Another instance of loose practice in which the ELC denies both the authority and clarity of the Word is that of the position of women in the church. A professor at the seminary of the ELC once made it a practice to go about in the congregations, lecturing to them on the merits of woman's suffrage. The students at the seminary were told that it was just as well to let the women vote and not to make any trouble over the issue. It was even stated by a seminary professor that women should be allowed to preach. It is common to hear women conducting chapel exercises over the air at one or more of the church colleges of the ELC. The constitutions which are printed at the publishing house of the ELC and recommended for use in the congregations contain no clause forbidding woman's suffrage, or lodgery either, for that matter. But God's Word, which must always be our final authority, says, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence," 1 Tim. 2.11-12, and "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church," 1 Cor. 14.34-35. It is contended that these verses apply only to the local situation at Corinth in the time of Paul, and thus they have no bearing upon us today. By the same token, John 3.16 applied only to Nicodemus. Here is as clear a case as can be found of the denial on the part of the ELC of both the authority and clarity of Scripture.

#### **Church and State**

In regard to the relation of Church and State, the ELC is also in error. The commonest example of this, of course, is the practice of baccalaureate services in connection with high school commencement exercises. A great many ELC pastors at one time or another have been involved in this activity which is a function of neither the Church nor the State. The president of the ELC took part in such a service by giving the invocation at the installation of the president of a large midwestern university. Several pastors of the

ELC have served or are serving as chaplains of state legislatures. Participation in the chaplaincy of the Army and Navy was very common, and there are countless instances of participation in Memorial Day observances and the like. We are opposed to this kind of loose practice on two grounds. First, the United States Constitution maintains the principle that Church and State shall be entirely separate. As Christians, in obedience to the Fourth Commandment and to Rom. 13.1-2: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God," we certainly want to abide by the Constitution of our country. Second, Scripture shows us plainly that there is to be a complete separation of Church and State: John 18.36, "My kingdom is not of this world," and Mt. 22.21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Jesus disclaims for Himself the position of a state official when he says to the man who wanted Him to divide the inheritance for him, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" Luke 12.14. The Scriptural teaching that the Church and State have each a definite realm also shows that we are to maintain strict separation. In our day the United States Supreme Court is showing the churches what they long ago should have learned from God's Word. Again the ELC has followed right along with the crowd, has listened to reason, to the world, but not to God's clear and authoritative Word.

#### **Unionism**

And finally we come to the subject of **Unionism**, the clearest example on the practical level of the refusal of the ELC to "continue" in God's Word. This sin occurs on both the synodical and congregational level. In either case it is wrong. On the synodical level perhaps the most glaring case is the fact that the president of the ELC along with the entire Church Council advocated that the ELC join the World Council of Churches, an organization which exists for the purpose of uniting all of Christendom in co-operation in religious activities without regard for doctrinal unity. That the highest officials should advocate such a move shows clearly the degree of unionistic liberalism to which the body has sunk. There are many in the ELC who oppose this move, but they still retain fellowship with these unionistic leaders and seem unable to bring them under synodical discipline.

However, the trend toward unionism in the ELC is not something new. It dates back to the very beginning of the church organized in 1917. The Hauge's Synod, one of the constituent groups forming the ELC, in 1916 issued what is called "An Interpretation of Certain Provisions of the Articles of Union and the Constitution, adopted by Hauge's Synod," in which among other things it "interpreted" Article 3 of the Articles of Union. Article 3 reads: "The three bodies promise one another in all seriousness to observe the rule not to carry on churchly cooperation with the Reformed and others who do not share the faith and confessions of these bodies." But in "interpreting" this article, Hauge's Synod said,

"The word 'cooperation' we understand to mean organized and continuous activity of a church character or also incidental and occasional reciprocal relations in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. On the other hand, we do not regard it as cooperation or unionism, when one occasionally takes part in weddings, funerals, Decoration Day programs, Chautauquas, graduation festivities at public schools, and the like, where ministers of other confessional groups also take part. Furthermore, we do not consider it contrary to this section to participate in such movements, which while they indubitably are of a religious nature, but embrace the whole Christian Church, as for example, ecumenical mission conferences, Student Volunteer Movement, Student Federation and Laymen's Missionary Movement. We consider these Christian religious movements more in the nature of practical enterprises than activities of purely churchly character." This request was presented for vote to the meetings of the United Church and the former Norwegian Synod. The United Church voted unanimously to accept the Hauge's Synod into fellowship with this understanding, and the Synod also accepted this provision by a large majority. Thus from its very inception the ELC was committed to a unionistic policy. Is it any wonder that such suggestions as that of joining the World Council of Churches have found much popularity in the ELC?

Furthermore, the ELC belongs to the International Missionary Council, a group organized for co-operative mission work without regard to doctrinal unity. The ELC holds membership in almost every "Lutheran" association. It belongs to the Lutheran World Federation, in which it is linked in pulpit and altar fellowship with the "Lutherans" of the liberal and unionistic State Churches of Europe, the Prussian Union church of Germany, and every kind of theological trend and tendency. It is common knowledge that the influence of Barthianism, which is really an error on the doctrine of the Word, has permeated European Lutheranism to a large extent. The Lutheran World Federation already had declared itself a member of the World Council of Churches, thus implicating all its members in every evil of the Council. The ELC belongs to the National Lutheran Council, which includes bodies which are even more error-ridden than the ELC. Thus in the United Lutheran Church, there are many pastors who hold membership in the Masonic Lodge, pastors who deny the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the historicity and correctness of Scripture and many fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The United Lutheran Church is connected with both the World Council of Churches and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, a most modernistic and unionistic group. The ELC is a member of the American Lutheran Conference, in which it is linked with the American Lutheran Church, in whose midst are again many who deny the verbal inspiration and correctness of Scripture, objective justification, salvation by grace alone, and other doctrines. The ELC as a member of the American Lutheran Conference is in fellowship with the Augustana Synod which is perhaps the most unionistic member of the Conference. For the Augustana Synod is con-

nected with both the World Council and the Federal Council; it has pastors who teach evolution, synergism, a faulty doctrine of inspiration. The ELC as a member of the American Lutheran Conference is in fellowship with the Lutheran Free Church, another very unionistic group. The Free Church does not even require its pastors to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession because it is in accord with Scripture. This group has openly in its church papers attacked the doctrine of verbal inspiration, as has also the United Lutheran Church. The Free Church has always stood for a synergistic doctrine of Conversion and Predestination, and has harbored error on absolution, the Church and Ministry, and other points. With all of these groups the ELC is officially in fellowship on a synodical basis. But God's Word says, "Beware of false phophets." Mt. 7.15. Does the ELC honestly make God's Word the sole authority for faith and life, or is that simply a catchy phrase by which the hearts of the simple are deceived?

Perhaps as sad an example of unionism as can be found in the ELC was the appearance of Dr. Otto Piper as a guest lecturer during a summer session at Luther Seminary in 1948. When the very heart of a synod, its theological seminary, indulges in open and unashamed unionism, the spirit of indifference to the truth has progressed far. Dr. Piper is a Presbyterian, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. To hold such a position a man must subscribe to the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian Church, a document which deviates from Scripture on such doctrines as the Universal Atonement, the Call in Conversion, Objective Justification, the Sabbath, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Predestination, the Church, and other points. Furthermore, Dr. Piper in his book, "God in History," pp. 61-2, says, "Old Testament scholars have recognized for a long time that the narratives and genealogies given in the first chapters of Genesis are not on the same level as historical records . . . In the first chapters of the Bible, human pre-history is narrated in mythological language."

The same loose practice of unionism occurs on the congregational level in the ELC. There are some pastors in the ELC who are much better in their practice in this respect than is their synod, although actually every pastor is responsible for and a party to all the official acts of his synod. But, on the other hand, there are all too many pastors and congregations in the ELC practicing open unionism of every kind and description. The president of the ELC took part in a program in which he gave the invocation and the Catholic archbishop of St. Paul gave the benediction. The unionism required of and practiced by chaplains, especially Navy Chaplains, is common knowledge. One pastor of the ELC was honorably discharged from the Navy when it was discovered that he conscientiously scruples against serving Communion to non-Lutherans. What about those who were not thus discharged? Many congregations of the ELC belong to local branches of the Federal Council of Churches. Some ELC pastors actually seem to court unionistic affairs, as, for example, a Minneapolis pastor who took part in a Sunday morning worship service in company with a Reformed

minister, a Salvation Army worker, a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, with music by a Masonic choir. Union Thanksgiving and Good Friday services are common, and such things as participation in Youth For Christ Rallies, Evangelistic campaigns, and activities with so-called Fundamentalist groups are in evidence. Thus both on the national and local level, synodical and congregational, unionism is rife in the ELC. The authority of God's Word is forgotten.

## II

### THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

As we said at the beginning, there are two reasons that the Norwegian Synod cannot have church fellowship with the ELC: first, that the ELC does not "continue" in God's Word either in doctrine or practice; and second, that the Norwegian Synod which earnestly endeavors to "continue" in God's Word is forbidden by that Word to have fellowship with teachers of false doctrine and those who indulge in loose practice. We have shown that the ELC does not "continue" in the Word in doctrine or practice. We shall now briefly consider the Scriptural principles which forbid us to practice fellowship with false teachers.

#### God Pleasing Fellowship

Scripture not only forbids us to have church fellowship with false prophets, but it also shows us what the God-pleasing practice of Christians is to be. In 1 Cor. 1.10 Paul admonishes, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." This one verse of Scripture clearly shows what God wants us to do in this matter. First, we are to "speak the same thing." That does not mean "almost the same thing," or "the same thing on fundamental doctrines," but it means what it says, "the same thing." The goal toward which Christians must strive in matters of personal relationships as well as matters of church fellowship is to "speak the same thing." It is argued that no two individuals, to say nothing of two church bodies, can ever arrive at this goal. If that were true, what then are we to do with passages like Acts 4.32, where we are told, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." Likewise the exhortations to unity in Rom. 15. 5-6, Phil. 1.27, 2.2 and elsewhere show that such a state can and should exist among Christians. The ELC with its Madison Settlement, which leaves several doctrines of God's Word matters of personal choice, can never even hope to obey the injunction laid down in 1 Cor. 1.10. The ELC has a unionistic basis, and as a result it is and will continue to be a unionistic church body.

The second point that 1 Cor. 1.10 teaches is that we are to "speak the same thing," **before** the "divisions" among us can be removed. In our day many are trying to heal the divided state of Christendom by **first** removing the divisions and **then** speaking



the same thing. This is really the definition of a unionist, one who seeks to remove the divisions of the Church before first removing points of doctrine which have caused the divisions. In this connection we should also point out that the clause, "and that there be no divisions among you," also means what it says; namely, that to have divisions is wrong, that they should be healed by brotherly admonition and discussion, and that to leave them matters of indifference or open questions is contrary to God's Word.

And finally, 1 Cor. 1.10 shows that this agreement and the removing of divisions must be a sincere, from-the-heart action. We are to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." There is to be no hypocrisy, no equivocations, no double talk, no generalizing; but rather a sincere, genuine agreement both in word and in content. This verse forbids all the sophistry which is so common in such formulae as the confession of the World Council of Churches, which confesses Jesus as "God and Saviour," but then refuses to explain it, allowing each party to understand it according to his own lights. No, Scripture exhorts us to a true meeting of minds and hearts as the basis for church fellowship.

Jesus prays in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17 that His disciples "may be one," **even as He and the Father are one.** This verse is often misused by unionists to prove that the churches should all get together regardless of doctrinal differences; but Jesus' expression 'even as we are one,' John 17.22, shows that Christ wants His Church to be as unified outwardly as it is already unified inwardly in Christ; and furthermore, the verse shows that Christ just as earnestly wants this outward unity to be a true picture of the inward, a genuine unity of the kind that exists between Him and His Father. This outward unity is not to be a patchwork, a hodge-podge of every shade and tendency known to man.

Our Confessions re-echo the same sentiment. In the Formula of Concord, XI, 95 we read: "We have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity (which, moreover, is not in our power to do). Nor would such peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest, condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity, according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ." What a denunciation this is of the unionistic unscriptural compromises of the ELC.

#### **"Beware of False Prophets"**

Not only does God tell us in positive language what kind of church fellowship He desires, but also in very clear language

He tells us that we are definitely to avoid false teachers and those who, denying the Word of God, do not "continue" in it. In Mt. 7.15 Christ warns us, "Beware of false prophets." Here again, if we are to be faithful to the Word, we must take this verse at its face value. Many have attempted to show that this and other verses do not apply to erring Christians but only to heathen. They have failed to prove their point. The verses themselves, as well as the many passages elsewhere in Scripture dealing with the importance of loyalty to the Word, show that not only heathen but also erring Christians are referred to in Mt. 7.15 and the other verses under discussion, such as Rom. 16.17, Tit. 3.10, etc. Christ says, Mt. 7.15, "Beware." The meaning and implications of this ought to be obvious. When we see a sign saying, "Beware of the dog," very few are so foolish as to go up to the dog and pet it or look at its teeth. Yet, strange to say, many Lutherans seem to think that "Beware of false prophets" means "fondle and embrace them." There are many other verses in Scripture; such as Rom. 16.17, Titus 3.10, 2 John 9-11, which re-echo the warning of Mt. 7.15.

From these verses we can easily see that God forbids those who have the truth of His Word to become partakers of the sin of false doctrine by compromising or denying the truth in any way. To practice church fellowship with those who openly and persistently teach and practice contrary to God's Word is to become a partaker of the sin of false doctrine by compromising or denying the truth in any way. To practice church fellowship with those who openly and persistently teach and practice contrary to God's Word is to become a partaker of their evil deeds. God has given us this direction in order that we may be protected from false prophets who come as wolves in sheep's clothing and destroy the sheep. He has also commanded us to avoid false doctrine, in order that we may hallow His name and glorify our Saviour. He has commanded us to avoid false teachers, in order that we may shame them and lead them to repent of their error. Our refusal of the hand of fellowship must always be in love, a love for God and His Word, a love for the errorist who, we pray, will repent, a love for our own salvation and that of our fellow believers. God in His Word clearly shows us that church fellowship is to be established on the basis of complete and sincere agreement on all teachings of Scripture, that the hand of fellowship is to be withheld from those who persistently adhere to unscriptural teaching and practice, that we must always love these errorists and labor for their conversion to the truth, for the true unity of the visible Church, for the glory of our Lord, and for the salvation of all men. Since the ELC does not adhere strictly to Scripture, the Norwegian Synod is forced by the Word to withhold the hand of fellowship from the group which has so much in common with us. We must continue to testify to the truth of the Word in the fervent hope that the errorists of the ELC, and those of all groups, may be led to repent of their errors, to put their whole confidence in the clear and authoritative Word of God, and to labor for the truth with all of their talents and abilities.

In conclusion, it is our earnest desire and prayer that our heaven-

ly Father will grant to the pastors and teachers of the ELC, who have been denying the truth, truly repentant hearts which will reach out with the one hope and desire to "continue" in His precious Word. God grant that we who have the truth may ever treasure and defend it, that we may always remain faithful to our dear Saviour and "continue" in His Word, and that we may testify so effectively, so graciously and in so kindly a spirit that by God's grace many others may be won to the truth of Faith Alone, Grace Alone, the Word Alone.

Soli Deo Gloria,

J. A. O. Preus, Jr.



# WHAT STANDS BETWEEN?

by J. A. O. Preus, Jr.

*Revised Edition 1949*

# *What Stands Between?*

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and truth shall make you free."

John 8.31-32

The implications of this verse from God's Holy Word are plain. Our loyalty to Scripture is a condition for three things: discipleship, knowledge of the truth, and freedom. Scripture teaches us that discipleship is the greatest blessing that can come to a person, for it includes forgiveness, salvation, righteousness, and perfect peace on earth and in heaven forever. Knowledge of the truth, as it is discussed in this text, is a knowledge that only God can give. When Jesus says that if we continue in His Word we shall know the truth, He means that we shall know the truth of our own sinfulness, of God's wondrous grace in Christ, of the only way unto eternal life. In fact, apart from the Word we can never know the truth, never know Christ, never be saved, never experience true peace and joy. And finally, if we continue in the Word, by the Word we shall be made free. This is a freedom high above that of the fondest human dreams. This is the freedom in Christ, the freedom from guilt, from sin, from punishment, from Satan, from hell, from the Law. This is a freedom unto God, unto righteousness, unto life everlasting, unto peace and joy in time and eternity. It is a most important thing for us to "continue" in God's Word.

One of the greatest tragedies of our time is the fact that so many millions of people who have had the opportunity to know God's Word are departing from it. But a tragedy far greater is to see whole church denominations turning their back on their only hope, their only treasure, their only reason for existence. American Protestantism, in the main, is a ship without an anchor, for it has cast off the only stabilizing force it could possess, the Word of God. Catholicism, of course, for centuries has tried to operate with human tradition on an equal plane with Scripture. As an organization Catholicism has been a success; as a church it has been almost a total failure. But saddest of all is to see the Lutheran Churches of America departing from the Word. It is true, of course, that many of these Lutherans brought with them from Europe the seeds of their present denials; but it is tragic, nevertheless, to see the churches which call Martin Luther their founder casting off that Word to which Luther was so faithful. The motto of Lutheranism has always been "the Word alone," but in many Lutheran groups in America today that motto is not being followed.

Not only, however, is the Lutheran Church in America troubled by infidelity to Scripture; it is also a divided group. The basic reason for these divisions is that some groups officially and in

actuality do not “continue” in God’s Word. Among the several Lutheran groups in America are two of Norwegian extraction, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (formerly the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, hereafter abbreviated “ELC”) and the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (hereafter called simply the Norwegian Synod). These two groups have much in common. The present Norwegian Synod is a successor to a much larger body of the same name which in 1917 united with the Hauge’s Synod and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, now ELC. Thus the two groups are of common national and historical background. Both claim loyalty to the Word, to the three universal creeds, to Luther’s Small Catechism, and to the Augsburg Confession; both use the same hymnbook, often the same catechism; both are located in the same geographical areas. One might well wonder why these two groups do not pool their forces and become one synod. The purpose of this paper is to show that, although there are many surface matters in common, actually there is a great difference between these two bodies which prevents their being in church fellowship. We shall attempt to answer the question: “What stands between” the ELC and the Norwegian Synod? Briefly, there are two reasons which forbid the Norwegian Synod to have church fellowship with the ELC: first, the ELC does not “continue” in God’s Word, either in doctrine or in practice; and second, the Norwegian Synod, earnestly endeavoring to “continue” in God’s Word, is forbidden by that Word to have fellowship with teachers of false doctrine and those who indulge in loose practice.

## I

### THE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORD

The basic reason for the Norwegian Synod’s refusal of the hand of fellowship to the ELC is that the ELC does not “continue” in the Word. This is a serious charge. The ELC fails to “continue” in the Word in two respects: first, it does not maintain faithfully the sole **authority** and perfect **clarity** of Scripture; second, it does not teach and practice in accordance with God’s authoritative and clear Word. Both the ELC and the Norwegian Synod confess that the Bible is the sole authority for faith and life. This is a good confession, but the ELC does not live up to it, as shall be shown later in this paper. However, there is another point on which almost from the very outset the Norwegian Synod and the ELC disagree; that is, the clarity of the Word of God. The Norwegian Synod along with the entire Synodical Conference has always maintained that the Bible is a clear book, in accordance with such passages as Ps. 119.105, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”, and 2 Pet. 1.19, “We also have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts.” The ELC, on the other hand, does not maintain that

Scripture is clear. It treats the Bible as an obscure book in which one may find many variant interpretations and uncertain statements. True, the ELC holds to the inspiration of Scripture and claims that Scripture does not contradict itself, but the ELC does not confess that the Word is clear and comprehensible to simple Christians. Actually, the doctrine of verbal inspiration becomes a rather mechanical and unreal thing, if it is defended at the same time that the clarity and, above all, the authority of Scripture are denied. For what is the difference if Scripture is verbally inspired or not, if it is neither clear enough to be understood nor authoritative for all faith and life? This, then, is the basic reason for the Norwegian Synod's refusal of church fellowship to the ELC; the ELC does not uphold the authority and clarity of the Word. The ELC thus does not "continue" in the Word. However, this denial has deeper implications; for the ELC, because of the fact that it does not "continue" in the Word, is plagued with false doctrine and loose practice.

#### A. FALSE DOCTRINE **The Madison Settlement in 1917**

A great deal has been spoken and written concerning the history of the ELC, especially in regard to the theological controversies. For anyone interested in reading the history of these controversies and learning wherein the different parties either "continued" in or rejected God's Word, we would refer him to the publication of the Norwegian Synod, written on the occasion of its ninetieth anniversary in 1943, entitled "Grace for Grace." We wish to mention only one historical document to point up the unscriptural position of the ELC, for this document to this day is the basis of the ELC. We are speaking of the **Madison Settlement** of 1912, which formed the basis for the union in 1917 of the former Norwegian Synod, Hauge's Synod, and the United Church. The Madison Settlement was drawn up in an attempt to settle the controversy on **Predestination** which had continued from about 1876 between the Norwegian Synod on the one hand and the groups later comprising the United Church on the other. Actually the Madison Settlement had to include far more than the doctrine of Predestination, for it is impossible to "discuss this teaching without considering such cardinal doctrines as Conversion, the Will of man, original sin, and even Justification. The Madison Settlement, as its name implies, was frankly and admittedly a compromise.

#### The Madison Settlement in 1948

The Rev. S. Gunderson, one of the framers of the Madison Settlement, said, "The United Church has not changed a tittle of its doctrine, neither has the Synod. The Madison Settlement is a compromise." This statement was made in 1913, but lest anyone believe that the position of the ELC has changed in the past thirty-five years we quote from the "Lutheran Herald," official publication, of the ELC, for May 18, 1948, p. 504, "When our Union Documents are termed 'compromises,' the expression is apt; one will search the record in vain to find that one party or another 'gave in.' The

negotiators simply learned that the differences were not breaches of the unity of the faith, that a unity of faith had, in fact, been present all the time.” To show the nature of this “unity of faith,” we quote from the same issue of the “Lutheran Herald” a few words by the Rev. J. E. Jorgensen, one of the framers of the Madison Settlement, “During the discussion (in preparation of the Madison Settlement), it was revealed that the opinion was held by some that man’s spiritual condition before conversion is that he is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins; and by others that he is not exactly dead but rather in a kind of neutral state, so that he is yet able to make his choice by his own power, between the way of life and the way of eternal damnation. (Phil. 2:12, ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.’ )

“It was found that another group agreed that sinful, unconverted man would eventually make such choice, but only after he received a new heart and had because a new creature, the workmanship of God the Holy Spirit. Thus what power of choice he would then have would be the gift of God and nothing of his own natural sinful power . . . The writer of these lines is glad, and gives thanks to God, when he notes that our church now, both in teaching and preaching, is holding fast to the Articles of Union (including the Madison Settlement), as is also the case at the theological seminaries.”

It should be clear to the most unobserving reader that the ELC has compromised the Word of God. We ask, who has given the ELC the right to compromise on any point of God’s Word? Because the doctrine of Predestination is not preached every Sunday (although there are at least thirteen pericope texts in the three series used by the ELC which deal directly with the doctrine of Predestination, and many other texts in the same series which lend themselves to a discussion of the doctrine) makes it neither unimportant nor non-divisive of church fellowship. If God considers a matter important enough to reveal it to us through His Word, we certainly ought, to consider the matter important enough not to make it a matter of indifference.

The Madison Settlement, as shown above, settled nothing. The ELC has always called this document “the Madison Agreement,” but in the “Lutheran Herald” for May 18, 1948, p. 509, the ELC confesses that the term “Madison Agreement” is “a somewhat unfortunate translation of the Norwegian. The word ‘Settlement’ is a far more accurate translation of the Norwegian word ‘Opgjoer’ than is ‘Agreement.’ ” This document simply declared that a member of the ELC can believe one of two “forms” on the doctrine of Predestination. One can either hold to the Scriptural teaching that God has predestinated us in Christ from the foundation of the world without any cause in us, His own grace and the merit of Christ being the sole causes; or he can believe that there is a third cause, namely man’s faith which God foresaw in eternity and as a result of which He determined to save man. This second “form” or view is unscriptural and anti-scriptural, for it makes man’s



faith a cause of his predestination, a teaching contrary to Scripture. Furthermore, the Madison Settlement opens the door to other false doctrines. Thus it is clear that the ELC officially refuses to "continue" in God's Word. The sole authority of Scripture is set aside, when a man-made document is given equal authority with it. Is there any essential difference between this setting aside of the Word and that of the Popes? The authority of Scripture, and along with it the clarity of the Word, have been sacrificed on the altar of human compromise in the very foundation of the ELC.

But there are those in our time who are saying that the fears of the men who mistrusted the Madison Settlement in 1917, and especially of those who remained outside the union of 1917 to form the present Norwegian Synod, were unfounded. The very up-to-date pronouncements in the "Lutheran Herald" should show anyone that the ELC stands exactly where it did in 1917, giving room for truth and error. However, in addition to the official stand of the ELC in the Madison Settlement there are two other courses open to us to determine what the ELC actually teaches and believes. First, we can investigate the teachings at the seminary of the ELC, teachings which will be held, as they have in the past, by a majority of the students: and, second, we can see what is tolerated and made room for within the church itself. If a doctrine is taught at the seminary contrary to God's Word, if the clergy of the synod is informed, and if no synodical action is taken, we can with fairness assume either that the majority of the clergy agree with the doctrine, or that it is indifferent to the truth. In either event the course of action is unscriptural. We shall now proceed to a discussion of the false doctrines taught at the seminary of the ELC and tolerated within the synod at large. We wish to make two points in passing: All errors of the ELC, as taught at its seminary, can be documented by personal class notes of the writer or by testimony of pastors in the ELC; furthermore, the most serious of these errors have been reported to the entire clergy of the ELC with no action as yet taken to correct them.

### Conversion

The most serious aberration from the truth concerns the doctrine of **conversion by grace alone**. "Conversion ... is the work of God by which man is, through the Gospel, transferred from a state of sin and wrath and spiritual death, in which by nature all men are, into a state of spiritual life and faith and grace in which alone the sinner can enjoy the benefits of Christ's redemption." (A. L. Graebner, *Doctrinal Theology*, St. Louis, 1910) The seminary of the ELC, however, teaches that conversion is not entirely a work of God, but that man also has some share; and this teaching is permitted by the Madison Settlement, as the above-quoted statement of the Rev. J. E. Jorgensen testifies.

Since the error of the ELC concerning the doctrine of Conversion affects many other teachings, it is good to give a brief summary of the position of the ELC, showing why this error arises. The prime thesis on which the doctrine of the ELC is built is that

God will not violate man's personality. At first glance this statement seems perfectly harmless, for none of us believes in irresistible grace, and we all believe that man is not coerced but rather graciously drawn in conversion. We all agree that natural man has a personality, and that God works upon it. We agree that in conversion man is conscious and experiences many emotions. But sin has corrupted human personality, and thus human personality has been violated. God did not do this, but nevertheless the human personality is not what it should be. In philosophical circles it is claimed as impossible to conceive of a human personality without the power of free choice, for, it is claimed, the essence of human personality is free choice. This is fine philosophy, but poor theology; but the ELC has approached the whole subject from a philosophical rather than a theological and Biblical standpoint. The reasoning of the ELC is about as follows: Since we all agree that man always has the power to reject grace both before and after conversion (this is Scriptural), then it must logically (but, we add, not Scripturally) follow, that man also has the power to **accept** grace. Again, this is good logic, but poor theology, for the Bible teaches that man possesses the power only to reject. Scripture says in Rom. 8.7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." To remain within the pale of the Lutheran Church, these teachers must admit that unregenerate man does not have free choice, which is always claimed for the inviolate personality; for in Luther's Explanation to the Third Article, which the ELC accepts, we read, "I cannot of my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel." This forces these teachers to put in another step, namely, that God gives powers through the Call, by which man may exercise free choice, and thus decide for or against Christ. Thus, they believe they have taught both the Scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace alone, since these powers are imparted by grace, and also that they have preserved man's personality inviolate. However, like all other doctrines of God's Word, conversion cannot be **logically** expained. The term "by grace alone" is bandied about very freely, but in actuality it is denied.

In order to describe the position of the ELC in greater detail, we shall cite one or two analogies which have been used at the seminary of the ELC to illustrate the doctrine of conversion. Man is described as being sick and on an operating table. God is a doctor who tells him that he is sick and needs an operation. Man refuses to cooperate, but gradually, through the enlightenment of the Gospel, he is given powers enabling him to cease resisting and finally to say, "Go ahead, God, and operate." At this point conversion occurs. A second analogy describes God as a vacuum cleaner salesman who approaches man, the sinner in need of conversion. Salvation is the vacuum cleaner. God begins his sales talk through the Word, but man at first is disinterested. Gradually, however, through the so-called Enlightenment period, man ceases to put up arguments and finally signs on the dotted line. He is converted. Both of these analogies show that in the final analysis conversion

and salvation depend upon man, for unless he makes an actual decision, he cannot be saved. Man is thus the deciding cause of his own conversion. Of course, all analogies break down, but as see above, the teaching at the ELC seminary is in accord with these analogies.

The first fault in the teaching of the ELC is that it is completely unscriptural. There is nothing in the Bible which even remotely suggests that we convert ourselves by imparted powers. The second error in the approach of the ELC is that it takes away the glory from God and gives it to man, for man is regarded as the deciding cause. And the fact that the ELC claims that its teaching gives all glory to God in no way makes any difference, for when man is the deciding cause, he deserves much glory. But God's Word says, Eph. 2.8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." This one verse of Scripture refutes both errors of the ELC, for by the words "and that not of yourselves" it shows that from first to last salvation is a work of God without the least co-operation by man. And this verse gives all the glory to God by the words "For by grace are ye saved" and "it is the gift of God." Our Confessions likewise declare clearly the glorious truth of the Word: "And it is neverthe less true that man before his conversion is still a rational creature, having an understanding and will; however, not an understanding with respect to divine things, or a will to will something good and salutary. Yet he can do nothing whatever towards his conversion, and is in this respect much worse than a stone and block; for he resists the Word and will of God, until God awakens him from the death of sin, enlightens and renews him." Formula of Concord, Thor. Deci. II, 59.

In connection with the doctrine of Conversion the ELC teaches erroneously also on what is called the "Enlightenment period." We are all agreed that in the conversion of a sinner there are certain preparatory activities. God approaches man with the Law to convict of sin and with the Gospel to convert men. But Rom. 8.7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and I Cor. 2.14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them," both show that until the moment of conversion man is opposed to God. There is no such thing as an Enlightenment period or intermediate state between spiritual life and spiritual death, any more than there is such a state between physical life and death. Christ says, "He that is not with me is against me." Matt. 12.30, Luke 11.23. This teaching of the ELC is simply another method of trying to abide by Scripture and yet make room for reason. The result is that reason is satisfied, but Scripture goes abegging. The above should suffice to show that the ELC does not maintain the sole authority of Scripture, for it seeks to accomodate itself to reason, which in this case is contrary to Scripture. Likewise, the clarity of the Bible is denied, for passages which are perfectly clear and which plainly apply to the issue are either declared unclear or inappropriate.

## The Will

So closely related to Conversion as to be almost a part of it is the doctrine of the **Will** of man. History has shown that it is practically impossible for one to teach error on the doctrine of Conversion and truth on the doctrine of the Will. The ELC at its seminary teaches that man's will is freed before conversion, thus enabling him to choose for or against Christ. This has been mentioned previously in connection with the discussion of the inviolate personality of man, but it deserves amplification. At the seminary of the ELC, it has been stated with all seriousness that man has two wills, the **voluntas** and the **arbitrium**, one of which is freed by the Call, before conversion, to enable man to choose Christ, the other remaining bound and manifesting itself in original sin. But Scripture plainly teaches that natural man is not such a free-agent personality as the ELC claims he is, for his will in spiritual things is bound before conversion. If man were a free-agent personality, he would no longer be a hopelessly lost sinner in need of God's boundless grace. The Fall has ruined man's personality by binding his will toward all that is evil. Scripture says, Eph. 4.17, "They (the unregenerate) walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Rom. 3.11-12. The Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. 11, 12 says, "Therefore the Scriptures deny to the intellect, heart, and will of the natural man all aptness, skill, capacity, and ability to think, to understand, to be able to do, to begin, to will, to undertake, to act, to work or to concur in working anything good and right in spiritual things as of himself."

As a further instance of error on the part of the ELC in regard to the doctrine of the Will, we might mention a class-room discussion which occurred in connection with the passage in the Formula of Concord where it is stated that man's will remains passive in conversion. This is one of the strongest statements in the Confessions against synergism or co-operation, yet it was twisted in such a way as to make room for the error of synergism. In Thor. Decl. n, 89 we read, "So also when Luther says that with respect to his conversion man is **pure passive** (purely passive), that is, does nothing whatever towards it, but only suffers what God works in him, his meaning is . . . that man of himself, or from his natural powers, cannot do anything or help towards his conversion, and that conversion is not only in part, but altogether, an operation, gift, and present, and work of the Holy Ghost alone, who accomplishes and effects it by His power and might, through the Word, in the intellect, will and heart of man ... while man does or works nothing, but only suffers." It should be clear from the above that Luther is here not teaching that man by suffering the Holy Ghost to work on him is doing something of his own will or ceasing to resist the Holy Ghost. It is plain that this passage simply means, as is said

in the next paragraph of the Formula of Concord, that the will of man is merely the “**Subjectum convertendum**,” “that which is to be converted.” But this passage was twisted to mean that even the Formula of Concord left the door open to allow man a small part in his conversion. This whole teaching of the ELC in regard to the Will of man is rationalistic and unscriptural. It indicates the position which reason holds as over against the Scripture. The Word, thus, in the ELC is not authoritative, but reason is.

### Original Sin

Closely related to the doctrine of Conversion and the Will is the doctrine of **Original Sin**. Again at this point the synergistic teaching of the ELC has perverted the authority and clarity of the Word. Since the ELC insists upon man’s self-determination in Conversion and the freedom of his will in the unregenerate state, it naturally follows that natural man cannot be quite as depraved and wicked as we Lutherans have been wont to describe him. The special point on which the ELC teaches erroneously in regard to the doctrine of Original Sin is that it denies that unconverted man is spiritually dead. With the synergistic view of the ELC it would be impossible for unregenerate man to be totally dead, since then a dead man could co-operate in his resurrection. But, they reason, if man is totally dead, then the reason that one is saved and another lost must lie in God Who raises one through the Gospel and allows another to continue on in death. However, they have determined a priori that man, not God, is the reason that one is saved and another lost. Thus it is absolutely essential, to the ELC, that the term “dead in trespasses and sins,” as it is taught in Eph. 2.1; 2.5; and Col. 2.13, be softened to some extent. The statement from the Rev. J. E. Jorgensen also showed this fact. At the seminary of the ELC the students are taught that man is not really “dead” spiritually but only “under the sentence of death” or “asleep.” Of course, a man “under the sentence of death” is still alive, and if his sentence were commuted he might go on to live for many years.

Scripture has thus been altered to make man an entirely different creature from what the Bible plainly declares him to be certainly an arbitrary alteration. Then all the terms in the Bible which refer to conversion as rebirth, John 3; as quickening, Eph. 2; as creation, Col. 2, really only mean, by this method of thinking, a release from prison, but not a giving of new life or a resurrection from the dead. We are constrained to ask, was the Holy Ghost so limited in vocabulary that He was unable to distinguish between “dead” and “under the sentence of death?” What becomes of the authority of God’s inspired Word, if we must now undertake to say what the Holy Ghost meant? Where is the clarity of Scripture, if the book is so dark that when it means to say “under the sentence of death,” the best it can do is to say “dead?” And how can we be sure of anything in the Bible if the book is so inaccurately written? God’s Word with its authority and clarity has been sacrificed in favor of human reason. But God says, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;” ’

Even if it conflicts with our reason to say so, we must confess that natural man is "dead in trespasses." That is the Scriptural doctrine of Original Sin. Our Confessions say the same: Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. II, 11, "Now, just as a man who is physically dead cannot of his own powers prepare or adapt himself to obtain temporal life again, so man who is spiritually dead in sins cannot of his own strength adapt or apply himself to the acquisition of spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life, unless he is delivered and quickened by the Son of God from the death of sin." But the Rev. Jorgenson has assured us that some of the framers of the Madison Settlement did not think that man was totally dead spiritually.

The clear-cut denial of the Scripture by the ELC demonstrates the terrible effect which comes from approaching theology with a preconceived notion. Scripture leaves us with many mysteries, and we must be content to let them remain as such. In regard to this whole subject the ELC teaches error because it begins with a subjective opinion, instead of letting God tell us how much and what He wants us to know. There is a whole host of Scripture passages arrayed against the synergism of the ELC, but because of the purely philosophical and psychological premise that man's personality cannot be violated, these Scripture truths are swept aside, and man is declared able to co-operate in conversion, to possess a free will and spiritual life before conversion. Such is the course of those who reject the authoritative and clear Word of God.

### **Predestination**

And now we come to the greatest example of synergistic presumption in the ELC, that a man is responsible for his own Predestination. This doctrine has been discussed earlier in connection with the Madison Settlement. The issue is simply this: Is predestination dependent upon anything that God foresees in man or not? The ELC, along with a great part of American Lutheranism, teaches that God predestinates us in view of the faith which in eternity He foresees we will possess in time. The ELC in the Madison Settlement officially "without reservation, accents that doctrine of election which is set forth in . . . Pontoppidan's Truth unto Godliness (Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed), question 548, the so-called Second Form of Doctrine." Question 548 of Pontoppidan's work reads as follows: "What is Election? Answer: God has appointed all those eternal life who He from eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ, and remain constant in this faith „unto the end." Placing God's foreseeing of faith before His election or predestination makes man's foreseen faith a cause of predestination. This, of course, is synergistic, for according to Scripture grace always precedes man's faith, and not vice versa. The ELC also at its seminary teaches predestination in view of faith, and it is safe to say that fully 75% of the clergy of that body adhere to this view.

The first error involved in the position of the ELC is that God's foreknowledge is confused with His predestination. The Formula

of Concord long ago settled this question, but it continually arises. Of course, God knows who shall eventually be saved and lost, but that fact is entirely separate and distinct from His decree of predestination. His foreknowledge extends to all people, but His predestination applies only to the beloved children of God and has no connection with those who are lost. We do not believe the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation, because God's Word does not teach it. On the other hand, for the same reason, we do not believe in predestination in view of faith. Scripture assigns only two reasons for our predestination, the grace of God and the merit of Christ. The ELC claims that it only assigns these two reasons too, but the statement from Pontoppidan and the use of the term "in view of faith" show that whether they admit it or not, they have made faith a cause of predestination. Especially when considered in the light of its synergism on Conversion, the teaching of the ELC in regard to the doctrine of Predestination is a completely synergistic teaching. Since the ELC is not content to leave as a mystery the question of why one is converted and another lost, it is also not content to leave as a mystery the question why one is predestinated to salvation and another not. And in solving these insoluble problems, as true synergists, they teach that the answer lies in man.

Scripture says, 2 Tim. 1.9, that God "hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,**" Eph. 1.4-5, "According as he hath **chosen us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, **according to the good pleasure of his will;**" and Eph. 1.11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, **being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.**" The Formula of Concord says, Thor. Decl. XI, 5, "The eternal election of God, however, that is, God's ordination to salvation, does not extend at once over the godly and the wicked, but only over the children of God, who were elected and ordained to eternal life before the foundation of the world was laid, as Paul says, Eph. 1.4-5." Again we see that the ELC has set aside the authority and clarity of God's Word to favor a human notion. The ELC has refused to leave as a mystery that which Scripture makes a mystery. It has made man's faith a cause of his predestination, an idea which is totally foreign to Scripture; and it has accommodated its synergistic reason by making faith precede predestination, just as in conversion it has made man's decision precede faith, a free will precede conversion, spiritual life precede regeneration. In other words, throughout the whole doctrine of salvation man always takes the lead, and God with His grace has followed. There is only one name for such rationalizing, synergism.

### **Justification—Faith a Gift**

We come next to a doctrine which is closely related to the foregoing, a doctrine which is the very heart of our Christian faith, Justification. It seems unbelievable that a church body which calls

itself Lutheran could be in error on this teaching which became the salvation of Martin Luther. And yet much of American Lutheranism, including the ELC, is in error on this central truth. Of course, it goes without saying that anyone who consistently teaches a synergistic doctrine of Conversion will teach erroneously on Justification, for a synergist makes faith something meritorious and a work of man, notwithstanding his protests to the contrary. But besides this, the error of the ELC is two-fold. The first error stems directly from its synergistic concept of Conversion. Scripture teaches that faith is a gift of God. This is entirely in accordance with the idea of salvation by grace alone, for, obviously, faith as a part of salvation then also is a gift of God's grace. In Eph. 2.8 the Holy Ghost tells us, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God.**"; and in Phil. 1.29 He says, "For unto you **it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him**, but also to suffer for his sake." But at the seminary of the ELC the students are taught that faith is not a gift of God. To call faith a gift would militate against the notion of man's inviolate personality, and this the synergistic teaching of the seminary of the ELC will not tolerate. The question is asked, "Is faith a **quantum** which can be given?" The answer, of course, at the seminary is that faith is not a **quantum**, and hence cannot be given. But Scripture and the Confessions, despite the rationalizing of the ELC, tell us that faith is given. It borders on the ridiculous to treat such flights of imagination seriously, but it is a sad fact that the majority of seminary students and pastors in the ELC seem to regard all this as entirely within the pale of Biblical Christianity. It is simply another plank in the structure of a theological system which uses the terminology of Scripture but denies the authority and clarity thereof.

### Objective Justification

The second error of the ELC in regard to the doctrine of Justification is a denial of the teaching of Objective Justification. The ELC has to confess faith in objective **reconciliation**, for in 2 Cor. 5.19 we read, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." But when reading this verse the ELC makes a purely philosophic distinction between reconciliation and justification. But what is the essential difference? Can we be reconciled and still not be justified? This is a mere quibbling over terms. Furthermore, the Scripture settles the problem completely in Rom. 4.25, saying "Christ was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Just as Christ was delivered for the offense of all, so he was raised again for the justification of all. And in Rom. 5.18-19 the last vestige of doubt is removed; "Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon **all men** to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon **all men unto justification of life**. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." The Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod sums up this teaching thus: "Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be right-



eous in Christ; Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 4:25.” Again we are constrained to say that the above treatment of clear Scripture shows the attitude of the ELC toward God’s Holy Word.

### **Conversion After Death**

Thus far we have had as our purpose to show how the ELC denies the authority and clarity of God’s Word by its erroneous and rationalistic teaching concerning the doctrine of salvation. However, while this is certainly the most serious and far-reaching error, it is by no means the only one. Another teaching which is presented at the seminary of the ELC, which has been reported to the entire clergy of the synod, and which has found some credence among the clergy, is the belief in the opportunity for the conversion of the heathen after death. At the root of this error is the same old synergistic idea of the inviolability of human personality. The line of argument is as follows: Since man’s personality cannot be violated, and since obviously many men die without the chance of either accepting or rejecting Christ, there must be a chance in the hereafter. Again, this is poor theology. For Scripture could hardly be clearer on anything than it is on the fact that there is no chance after death. In Luke 16:23 we are informed that “there is a great gulf fixed,” so that one cannot pass from hell to heaven. In Heb. 9:27 we are told that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Nothing is said in this verse or elsewhere that would indicate that man has a chance either to hear the Gospel or be converted after death. To build a doctrine on the silence of Scripture is certainly a poor way to handle the Word. 2 Cor. 5:10 states: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body.” The only conclusion we can draw from this verse is that judgment is to be made on the basis of this life, and after this life the chance for changing the judgment of Christ has passed. Need we say more to illustrate the completely antiscritptural nature of the teaching of the ELC? And does this not demonstrate forcibly the terrible consequences of approaching the study of God’s Word with preconceived notions? Here again reason sets aside the clarity and authority of the Word.

### **Hades**

Closely related to the above the erroneous teaching that the souls of the departed do not go directly to heaven or to hell but to some intermediate state. This error is based on a faulty handling of certain verses of Scripture. It is claimed that there is a distinction between the words **Hades** and **Gehenna** in the original language. A careful study shows that this is a non-existent distinction, and that the souls of the departed, except for the fact that they are not as yet united with the bodies, are in the same state as they will be through all eternity. This point to some may seem to be a quibbling over words, but again the clarity and authority of God’s Word are at stake. Nothing in Scripture is unimportant.

### **Millenialism**

Another error tolerated within the ELC is **Pre-millennialism**.

It is impossible within the scope of this paper to describe the various flights of fancy which pass for Scriptural truth in regard to this doctrine, for almost all Pre-millennialists have some particular peculiarity. Suffice it to say that in the past there have been at least two teachers at the ELC seminary who have propounded Pre-millennialism. A prominent pastor of the ELC gave a series of broadcasts on the subject, in which he favored this unscriptural teaching. The Lutheran Bible Institute of Minneapolis, a school which educates many pastors and missionaries of the ELC, has premillennialists on its staff, and there are any number of pastors in parishes of the ELC who believe and teach this unscriptural doctrine. In brief, Pre-millennialism may be defined as a literalistic use of the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation, involving the idea that Christ will return to reign visibly on earth for a thousand years before Judgment Day. The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament clearly show that the language of Revelation on this point as well as on many others is figurative, apocalyptic language and was never intended to be taken literally. Pre-millennialism itself is a confession of the wrong use of Scripture with special error on the matter of the clarity of the Word. When a church body arbitrarily makes this teaching an open question and allows its members to believe and teach whatever they please, that church body demonstrates that in its opinion Scripture is neither clear nor authoritative. Such a church body is the ELC.

### **Antichrist**

Still another error which often involves a study of the last things is the doctrine of the **Antichrist**. Actually this doctrine does not involve a study of the last things only, for the Antichrist of 2; Thess. 2 is present with us today too; but many see the Antichrist as some character arising shortly before the end of the world. Scripture plainly teaches in 2 Thess. 2 that the Pope at Rome is and will remain the Antichrist. Likewise, our Confessions are entirely clear on this matter, Schmalkald Articles, Part II, Art. IV, 10. But there does not seem to be a single seminary professor in the ELC who believes that the Pope is the Antichrist, and the number of pastors who do so is negligible. Here again the authority and clarity of Scripture are denied in the ELC.

### **Creation**

In regard to the doctrine of creation the ELC also teaches erroneously. At the seminary the students are taught that the term "day" as used in Gen. 1 refers to a long period of time and not to the calendar day. The students are taught that theistic evolution is a perfectly plausible and acceptable theory. But a study of Gen. 1 should be enough to convince anyone that the clear and natural meaning of "day" is a normal calendar day. Any other interpretation is strained and out of harmony with the text. Why then do they teach a longer creation period? Because they wish to accommodate themselves to the prevailing scientific views and theories. When Scripture and Science disagree, Science is wrong. Here again is a simple example of setting aside the clear and authoritative Word and placing human reason in its place.

## **Progressive Revelation**

The students at the seminary of the ELC are also taught the false doctrine known as Progressive Revelation. This teaching maintains that the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets had little or no knowledge of a personal Messiah, of the Holy Ghost, or of the Trinity. Furthermore, progressive revelation teaches that these Old Testament characters were saved not by faith in Christ, but by faith in the power of God. This is a clear denial of the scriptural doctrine that there is salvation in Christ alone, for if the people in the Old Testament era could be saved without faith in Christ, what is to prevent people in our era from being saved in the same manner? It is especially strange that this view is held in the ELC, because those who are most eager in propounding it are just as eager to disavow any doctrine of inspiration which makes the writers of Scripture mere secretaries of the Holy Ghost. Thus, according to those who hold to Progressive Revelation, David must have been very confused when he wrote, Ps. 110.1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." For David here speaks of two people called "Lord," but we know that David, the mightiest ruler of Israel, called only God "Lord." Thus David must either have been speaking of a conversation between the Father and the Son, as the New Testament in at least six places interprets the verse, or else he did not know what he was talking about. When Paul tells us in so many places that Abraham was saved by faith, Paul is referring to faith in Christ: otherwise the force of his whole argument would fall flat. When Jesus says that Abraham rejoiced to see his day, John 8.56, there was more than simply the belief in God's ability to save in that rejoicing; there was the clear foreknowledge of Christ given by God, so beautifully described in Heb. 11. Even the Jews to whom Jesus was talking understood Him to be referring to a personal meeting for they said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old and hast thou seen Abraham?" And Jesus answers in the affirmative, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

We have another sample of progressive revelation theology in a series in the "Lutheran Herald" by Doctor Jacob Tanner, professor emeritus at Luther Theological Seminary. In the "Lutheran Herald" for Sept. 27, 1949, Dr. Tanner says, "God's self-revelation was accomplished through a historical process of a progressive character. God did not reveal Himself like a flash of lightning. The truth at first was presented in an embryonic condition and in temporary clothing; and little by little it was unfolded by additions, enlarging the truth and furnishing new light for faith and life. This unfolding continued until God's self-revelation was completed in Jesus Christ. Genesis 3.15 contains the promise of the coming of Christ, but in an embryonic form. It is true as far as it goes, but it needed the full unfolding that we can trace through the Old Testament, and the completion in Christ Himself, in order to bring out its full, hidden content . . . The capacity for receiving and using the added knowledge would increase as the knowledge that was already received was being used. Thus God would add

that would enable those that had it to make a saving use of God's final revelation in Christ, (emphasis ours). Cf. Rom. 4.3.

"The Bible cannot be separated from God's progressive selfrevelation. God's revelation of Himself unto man's salvation produced the Bible."

One cannot escape the impression from reading Dr. Tanner's words that the theory of evolution has unduly influenced him. He seems to regard the people of the Old Testament era as lacking the "capacity for receiving and using" the full revelation of God. Where in Scripture does he find this teaching? It is true that God chose not to send His Son into the world at once after the fall. It is true that the believers of the Old Testament era did not have all of the knowledge that we Christians of the New Testament era have. Dr. Tanner speaks as if the believers of the Old Testament times were inferior in intellect and spiritual understanding to those of New Testament times. It is true, of course, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him;" but there is nothing in Scripture to show that the Old Testament believers were spiritually weaker and had less capacity than these New Testament Christians. Else why are the New Testament believers pointed to the wonderful examples of faith in Heb. 11, where the faith of the believers in the Old Testament era is described? According to Dr. Tanner and those who follow his teachings, the New Testament Christian is exhorted to look to men with less capacity and weaker faith than himself for strength and encouragement in his Christian life.

One cannot read Dr. Tanner's series without being struck at once by the similarity of his ideas to those of Dr. Reu of a decade ago, as shown in his "What Is Scripture?". Therein Dr. Reu overemphasizes the human side of Scripture with an invitation to numberless errors regarding the historicity, scientific accuracy, and geographical exactness of Scripture. Space does not permit pointing out the similarities in detail, except to mention that both Dr. Tanner and Dr. Reu appear to confuse Revelation and Inspiration, both emphasize the notion of development and gradual nature of this Revelation, and both thereby play into the hands of the evolutionistic theories so rampant in our day. In the negotiations between the American Lutheran Church, represented by Dr. Reu and the Missouri Synod, the essential difference in the position regarding Scripture held by the two groups became most evident in Dr. Reu's refusal to accept unqualifiedly the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod and in the final cessation of negotiations between the two groups largely over this point. As far as we can determine, Dr. Tanner is in almost complete agreement with the teachings of Dr. Reu.

#### **Other Teachings**

And finally we come to some teachings which do not necessarily destroy any doctrine of the faith, but which amount to a denial of the clarity of Scripture on the part of the ELC. The students at the seminary of the ELC are taught that the account of Joshua and the stopping of the sun in Josh. 10.12-14, is poetry, not history.

They are taught that Paul in Rom. 7.15-25 is speaking of an unregenerate man, an interpretation which is counter both to the analogy of Scripture, to the Lutheran Confessions, and to the interpretations of nearly every Christian commentator on the Bible. They are taught that John 3.5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," does not apply to Christian Baptism, a view which does much to destroy the importance of Baptism, a view which certainly renders Scripture an unclear book. They are taught that the "judgment" which comes as a result of unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 11.25, is only a physical, not a spiritual judgment. These are some so-called exegetical points on which the ELC is in error. They show that the authority and clarity of Scripture are denied.

## B. LOOSE PRACTICE

Having discussed the doctrinal aberrations of the ELC, and having endeavored to show that these errors arise out of a fundamental disloyalty to the Word of God, which is manifested primarily in a denial of the authority and clarity of Scripture, we now turn to the second result of this failure to "continue" in the Word; namely, to the instances of loose practice in the ELC. Disloyalty to the Word and false doctrine invariably produce loose practice.

### Synodical Discipline

The first kind of loose practice to result from a faulty attitude toward the Word is the neglect of church discipline on the congregational level and of synodical discipline on the level of the church at large. The ELC has succumbed to the temptation toward loose synodical discipline in regard both to doctrinal and moral lapses on the part of pastors in the group. Although the entire clergy, and especially the Church Council of the ELC, have been informed of the major part of the errors listed above, there is to date no evidence that anything has been done to correct the situation by way of a public retraction or correction. We trust that something has been done privately. There is perhaps no point in piling up a list of examples of lack of synodical discipline in the ELC. Let it suffice to say that both doctrinal and moral offenders have gone undisciplined in many instances. It may be argued that a synod is not a divine institution, and therefore that the rules for church discipline laid down in Mt. 18 do not apply to a synod. But we will all agree that a synod ought most certainly be an outward expression of an inward fellowship. The adherence to the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as confessions make a synod a confessional group in which it is expected that the members subscribe to and teach according to these confessions **because** they are in accord with the Word of God. And yet the confessions are violated on every hand and at the very heart of the ELC, at its seminary. But no synodical discipline is invoked, for it has completely broken down in the ELC. But God's Word says, I Cor. 1.10, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind

and in the same judgment.” Synodical discipline is in accord with God’s Word. Failure to administer it is a sin. The ELC does not heed God’s command, but does as it wishes. And it wishes only peace. The president of the seminary told this writer that the church was “big enough” for these various differences of opinion and tendencies. Synodical discipline is practically passe in the ELC.

### **Lodgery**

With the failure of a synod to “continue” in God’s Word and with its failure to practice synodical discipline all kinds of looseness arise. One of the most insidious and difficult symptoms of this looseness is lodgery. The ELC is filled with lodge members of every kind and description. By God’s grace there still are a few pastors in the group who try to take a confessional stand, but the great majority are disinclined either to keep lodge members from joining their congregations or to do much to get church members to give up their lodge membership. It is safe to say that there is hardly a single large city church and very few small town churches in the ELC, which do not have at least a sprinkling of lodge members. Some congregations are known to have specified when calling a man as pastor that he is never to oppose the lodge. In January, 1949, Dr. O. G. Malmin, Editor of the “Lutheran Herald”, official organ of the ELC, before a congregation of his church body criticized the Norwegian Synod (and thus the entire Synodical Conference) for being “so narrow that they do not allow women to vote or lodge member in their churches.” The students at the ELC seminary are taught that they should discuss lodge membership with church members and prospects, and then allow the individual to decide whether with good conscience he can belong to both church and lodge. If the individual decides that he can conscientiously belong to both, the pastor should drop the matter. Thus the conscience becomes the supreme authority, and God’s Word which tells us not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” 2 Cor. 6.14, is no longer the sole authority for faith and life.

### **Deistic Societies**

The ELC takes no definite stand against deistic Veterans’ organizations and Scouting, which are closely related to lodgery. The average pastor has no idea that these organizations have anything about them which is contrary to God’s Word, although their ignorance is certainly no excuse, for even a sketchy study of the principles of these groups should show their essentially deistic nature. It is quite common for an ELC pastor to act as chaplain for a national Veterans’ organization or a mixed Scout group. A pastor of the ELC recently served as National Chaplain for the American Legion, and he had as one of his publicly stated purposes an attempt to make the Legion a more religious organization. The “Lutheran Herald” every month devotes some space to the subject of church-sponsored Scout troops and Scout work. Not only are pastors who work with such groups involved in a deistic religion but also they are often involved in the grossest kind of unionism, both of which are forbidden in God’s Word. The above-quoted passage from 2

Cor. 6.14, applies to every organization in which a religious creed or subscription is required, but in which the names of the Trinity and of Christ are, as a matter of principle, omitted. And such a passage as Rom. 16.17 or 1 Cor. 1.10 forbids unionistic prayer and worship with members of heterodox churches, even if they do confess faith in the Trinity and in Christ as Saviour. This confessional looseness is simply another of a long list of indications that the ELC does not have fidelity to the Word as its chief objective.

### **Other Practices**

On such matters as funerals, baptisms, communion, and other pastoral functions, it is difficult to make any sweeping statements in regard to the practice of the ELC. But it has been this writer's experience, albeit limited to the area of the Twin Cities, that the pastors of the ELC are far more liberal than Scriptural practice allows, particularly with regard to Communion.

### **Women in the Church**

Another instance of loose practice in which the ELC denies both the authority and clarity of the Word is that of the position of women in the church. A professor at the seminary of the ELC once made it a practice to go about in the congregations, lecturing to them on the merits of woman's suffrage. The students at the seminary were told that it was just as well to let the women vote and not to make any trouble over the issue. It was even stated by a seminary professor that women should be allowed to preach. It is common to hear women conducting chapel exercises over the air at one or more of the church colleges of the ELC. The constitutions which are printed at the publishing house of the ELC and recommended for use in the congregations contain no clause forbidding woman's suffrage, or lodgery either, for that matter. But God's Word, which must always be our final authority, says, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence," 1 Tim. 2.11-12, and "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church," 1 Cor. 14.34-35. It is contended that these verses apply only to the local situation at Corinth in the time of Paul, and thus they have no bearing upon us today. By the same token, John 3.16 applied only to Nicodemus. Here is as clear a case as can be found of the denial on the part of the ELC of both the authority and clarity of Scripture.

### **Church and State**

In regard to the relation of Church and State, the ELC is also in error. The commonest example of this, of course, is the practice of baccalaureate services in connection with high school commencement exercises. A great many ELC pastors at one time or another have been involved in this activity which is a function of neither the Church nor the State. The president of the ELC took part in such a service by giving the invocation at the installation of the president of a large midwestern university. Several pastors of the

ELC have, served or are serving as chaplains of state legislatures. Participation in the chaplaincy of the Army and Navy was very common, and there are countless instances of participation in Memorial Day observances and the like. We are opposed to this kind of loose practice on two grounds. First, the United States Constitution maintains the principle that Church and State shall be entirely separate. As Christians, in obedience to the Fourth Commandment and to Rom. 13.1-2: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God," we certainly want to abide by the Constitution of our country. Second, Scripture shows us plainly that there is to be a complete separation of Church and State: John 18.36, "My kingdom is not of this world," and Mt. 22.21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Jesus disclaims for Himself the position of a state official when he says to the man who wanted Him to divide the inheritance for him, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" Luke 12.14. The Scriptural teaching that the Church and State have each a definite realm also shows that we are to maintain strict separation. In our day the United States Supreme Court is showing the churches what they long ago should have learned from God's Word. Again the ELC has followed right along with the crowd, has listened to reason, to the world, but not to God's clear and authoritative Word.

### **Unionism**

And finally we come to the subject of **Unionism**, the clearest example on the practical level of the refusal of the ELC to "continue" in God's Word. This sin occurs on both the synodical and congregational level. In either case it is wrong. On the synodical level perhaps the most glaring case is the fact that the president of the ELC along with the entire Church Council advocated that the ELC join the World Council of Churches, an organization which exists for the purpose of uniting all of Christendom in cooperation in religious activities without regard for doctrinal unity. That the highest officials should advocate such a move shows clearly the degree of unionistic liberalism to which the body has sunk. There are many in the ELC who oppose this move, but they still retain fellowship with these unionistic leaders and seem unable to bring them under synodical discipline.

However, the trend toward unionism in the ELC is not something new. It dates back to the very beginning of the church organized in 1917. The Hauge's Synod, one of the constituent groups forming the ELC, in 1916 issued what is called "An Interpretation of Certain Provisions of the Articles of Union and the Constitution, adopted by Hauge's Synod," in which among other things it "interpreted" Article 3 of the Articles of Union. Article 3 reads: "The three bodies promise one another in all seriousness to observe the rule not to carry on churchly cooperation with the Reformed and others who do not share the faith and confessions of these bodies." But in "interpreting" this article, Hauge's Synod said,



“The word ‘cooperation’ we understand to mean organized and continuous activity of a church character or also incidental and occasional reciprocal relations in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. On the other hand, we do not regard it as cooperation or unionism, when one occasionally takes part in weddings, funerals, Decoration Day programs, Chautauquas, graduation festivities at public schools, and the like, where ministers of other confessional groups also take part. Furthermore, we do not consider it contrary to this section to participate in such movements, which while they indubitably are of a religious nature, but embrace the whole Christian Church, as for example, ecumenical mission conferences, Student Volunteer Movement, Student Federation and Laymen’s Missionary Movement. We consider these Christian religious movements more in the nature of practical enterprises than activities of purely churchly character.” This request was presented for vote to the meetings of the United Church and the former Norwegian Synod. The United Church voted unanimously to accept the Hauge’s Synod into fellowship with this understanding, and the Synod also accepted this provision by a large majority. Thus from its very inception the ELC was committed to a unionistic policy. Is it any wonder that such suggestions as that of joining the World Council of Churches have found much popularity in the ELC?

Furthermore, the ELC belongs to the International Missionary Council, a group organized for co-operative mission work without regard to doctrinal unity. The ELC holds membership in almost every “Lutheran” association. It belongs to the Lutheran World Federation, in which it is linked in pulpit and altar fellowship with the “Lutherans” of the liberal and unionistic State Churches of Europe, the Prussian Union church of Germany, and every kind of theological trend and tendency. It is common knowledge that the influence of Barthianism, which is really an error on the doctrine of the Word, has permeated European Lutheranism to a large extent. The Lutheran World Federation already had declared itself a member of the World Council of Churches, thus implicating all its members in every evil of the Council. The ELC belongs to the National Lutheran Council, which includes bodies which are even more error-ridden than the ELC. Thus in the United Lutheran Church, there are many pastors who hold membership in the Masonic Lodge, pastors who deny the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the historicity and correctness of Scripture and many fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The United Lutheran Church is connected with both the World Council of Churches and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, a most modernistic and unionistic group. The ELC is a member of the American Lutheran Conference, in which it is linked with the American Lutheran Church, in whose midst are again many who deny the verbal inspiration and correctness of Scripture, objective justification, salvation by grace alone, and other doctrines. The ELC as a member of the American Lutheran Conference is in fellowship with the Augustana Synod which is perhaps the most unionistic member of the Conference. For the Augustana Synod is con-

nected with both the World Council and the Federal Council; it has pastors who teach evolution, synergism, a faulty doctrine of inspiration. The ELC as a member of the American Lutheran Conference is in fellowship with the Lutheran Free Church, another very unionistic group. The Free Church does not even require its pastors to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession **because** it is in accord with Scripture. This group has openly in its church papers attacked the doctrine of verbal inspiration, as has also the United Lutheran Church. The Free Church has always stood for a synergistic doctrine of Conversion and Predestination, and has harbored error on absolution, the Church and Ministry, and other points. With all of these groups the ELC is officially in fellowship on a synodical basis. But God's Word says, "Beware of false phophets." Mt. 7.15. Does the ELC honestly make God's Word the sole authority for faith and life, or is that simply a catchy phrase by which the hearts of the simple are deceived?

Perhaps as sad an example of unionism as can be found in the ELC was the appearance of Dr. Otto Piper as a guest lecturer during a summer session at Luther Seminary in 1948. When the very heart of a synod, its theological seminary, indulges in open and unashamed unionism, the spirit of indifference to the truth has progressed far. Dr. Piper is a Presbyterian, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. To hold such a position a man must subscribe to the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian Church, a document which deviates from Scripture on such doctrines as the Universal Atonement, the Call in Conversion, Objective Justification, the Sabbath, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Predestination, the Church, and other points. Furthermore, Dr. Piper in his book, "God in History," pp. 61-2, says, "Old Testament scholars have recognized for a long time that the narratives and genealogies given in the first chapters of Genesis are not on the same level as historical records ... In the first chapters of the Bible, human pre-history is narrated in mythological language."

The same loose practice of unionism occurs on the congregational level in the ELC. There are some pastors in the ELC who are much better in their practice in this respect than is their synod, although actually every pastor is responsible for and a party to all the official acts of his synod. But, on the other hand, there are all too many pastors and congregations in the ELC practicing open unionism of every kind and description. The president of the ELC took part in a program in which he gave the invocation and the Catholic archbishop of St. Paul gave the benediction. The unionism required of and practiced by chaplains, especially Navy Chaplains, is common knowledge. One pastor of the ELC was honorably discharged from the Navy when it was discovered that he held conscientious scruples against serving Communion to non-Lutherans. What about those who were not thus discharged? Many congregations of the ELC belong to local branches of the Federal Council of Churches. Some ELC pastors actually seem to court unionistic affairs, as, for example, a Minneapolis pastor who took part in a Sunday morning worship service in company with a Reformed

minister, a Salvation Army worker, a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, with music by a Masonic choir. Union Thanksgiving and Good Friday services are common, and such things as participation in Youth For Christ Rallies, Evangelistic campaigns, and activities with so-called Fundamentalist groups are in evidence. Thus both on the national and local level, synodical and congregational, unionism is rife in the ELC. The authority of God's Word is forgotten.

## II

### THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

As we said at the beginning, there are two reasons that the Norwegian Synod cannot have church fellowship with the ELC: first, that the ELC does not "continue" in God's Word either in doctrine or practice; and second, that the Norwegian Synod which earnestly endeavors to "continue" in God's Word is forbidden by that Word to have fellowship with teachers of false doctrine and those who indulge in loose practice. We have shown that the ELC does not "continue" in the Word in doctrine or practice. We shall now briefly consider the Scriptural principles which forbid us to practice fellowship with false teachers.

#### God Pleasing Fellowship

Scripture not only forbids us to have church fellowship with false prophets, but it also shows us what the God-pleasing practice of Christians is to be. In 1 Cor. 1.10 Paul admonishes, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." This one verse of Scripture clearly shows what God wants us to do in this matter. First, we are to "speak the same thing." That does not mean "almost the same thing," or "the same thing on fundamental doctrines," but it means what it says, "the same thing." The goal toward which Christians must strive in matters of personal relationships as well as matters of church fellowship is to "speak the same thing." It is argued that no two individuals, to say nothing of two church bodies, can ever arrive at this goal. If that were true, what then are we to do with passages like Acts 4.32, where we are told, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." Likewise the exhortations to unity in Rom. 15. 5-6, Phil. 1.27, 2.2 and elsewhere show that such a state can and should exist among Christians. The ELC with its Madison Settlement, which leaves several doctrines of God's Word matters of personal choice, can never even hope to obey the injunction laid down in 1 Cor. 1.10. The ELC has a unionistic basis, and as a result it is and will continue to be a unionistic church body.

The second point that 1 Cor. 1.10 teaches is that we are to "speak the same thing," **before** the "divisions" among us can be removed. In our day many are trying to heal the divided state of Christendom by **first** removing the divisions and **then** speaking

the same thing. This is really the definition of a unionist, one who seeks to remove the divisions of the Church before first removing points of doctrine which have caused the divisions. In this connection we should also point out that the clause, "and that there be no divisions among you," also means what it says; namely, that to have divisions is wrong, that they should be healed by brotherly admonition and discussion, and that to leave them matters of indifference or open questions is contrary to God's Word.

And finally, 1 Cor. 1.10 shows that this agreement and the removing of divisions must be a sincere, from-the-heart action. We are to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." There is to be no hypocrisy, no equivocations, no double talk, no generalizing; but rather a sincere, genuine agreement both in word and in content. This verse forbids all the sophistry which is so common in such formulae as the confession of the World Council of Churches, which confesses Jesus as "God and Saviour," but then refuses to explain it, allowing each party to understand it according to his own lights. No, Scripture exhorts us to a true meeting of minds and hearts as the basis for church fellowship.

Jesus prays in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17 that His disciples "may be one," **even as He and the Father are one**. This verse is often misused by unionists to prove that the churches should all get together regardless of doctrinal differences; but Jesus' expression 'even as we are one,' John 17.22, shows that Christ wants His Church to be as unified outwardly as it is already unified inwardly in Christ; and furthermore, the verse shows that Christ just as earnestly wants this outward unity to be a true picture of the inward, a genuine unity of the kind that exists between Him and His Father. This outward unity is not to be a patchwork, a hodgepodge of every shade and tendency known to man.

Our Confessions re-echo the same sentiment. In the Formula of Concord, XI, 95 we read: "We have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity (which, moreover, is not in our power to do). Nor would such peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest, condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity, according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ." What a denunciation this is of the unionistic unscriptural compromises of the ELC.

### **"Beware of False Prophets"**

Not only does God tell us in positive language what kind of church fellowship He desires, but also in very clear language

He tells us that we are definitely to avoid false teachers and those who, denying the Word of God, do not “continue” in it. In Mt. 7.15 Christ warns us, “Beware of false prophets.” Here again, if we are to be faithful to the Word, we must take this verse at its face value. Many have attempted to show that this and other verses do not apply to erring Christians but only to heathen. They have failed to prove their point. The verses themselves, as well as the many passages elsewhere in Scripture dealing with the importance of loyalty to the Word, show that not only heathen but also erring Christians are referred to in Mt. 7.15 and the other verses under discussion, such as Rom. 16.17, Tit. 3.10, etc. Christ says, Mt. 7.15, “Beware.” The meaning and implications of this ought to be obvious. When we see a sign saying, “Beware of the dog,” very few are so foolish as to go up to the dog and pet it or look at its teeth. Yet, strange to say, many Lutherans seem to think that “Beware of false prophets” means “fondle and embrace them.” There are many other verses in Scripture; such as Rom. 16.17, Titus 3.10, 2 John 9-11, which re-echo the warning of Mt. 7.15.

From these verses we can easily see that God forbids those who have the truth of His Word to become partakers of the sin of false doctrine by compromising or denying the truth in any way. To practice church fellowship with those who openly and persistently teach and practice contrary to God’s Word is to become a partaker of the sin of false doctrine by compromising or denying the truth in any way. To practice church fellowship with those who openly and persistently teach and practice contrary to God’s Word is to become a partaker of their evil deeds. God has given us this direction in order that we may be protected from false prophets who come as wolves in sheep’s clothing and destroy the sheep. He has also commanded us to avoid false doctrine, in order that we may hallow His name and glorify our Saviour. He has commanded us to avoid false teachers, in order that we may shame them and lead them to repent of their error. Our refusal of the hand of fellowship must always be in love, a love for God and His Word, a love for the errorist who, we pray, will repent, a love for our own salvation and that of our fellow believers. God in His Word clearly shows us that church fellowship is to be established on the basis of complete and sincere agreement on all teachings of Scripture, that the hand of fellowship is to be withheld from those who persistently adhere to unscriptural teaching and practice, that we must always love these errorists and labor for their conversion to the truth, for the true unity of the visible Church, for the glory of our Lord, and for the salvation of all men. Since the ELC does not adhere strictly to Scripture, the Norwegian Synod is forced by the Word to withhold the hand of fellowship from the group which has so much in common with us. We must continue to testify to the truth of the Word in the fervent hope that the errorists of the ELC, and those of all groups, may be led to repent of their errors, to put their whole confidence in the clear and authoritative Word of God, and to labor for the truth with all of their talents and abilities.

In conclusion, it is our earnest desire and prayer that our heaven

ly Father will grant to the pastors and teachers of the ELC, who have been denying the truth, truly repentant hearts which will reach out with the one hope and desire to “continue” in His precious Word. God grant that we who have the truth may ever treasure and defend it, that we may always remain faithful to our dear Saviour and “continue” in His Word, and that we may testify so effectively, so graciously and in so kindly a spirit that by God’s grace many others may be won to the truth of Faith Alone, Grace Alone, the Word Alone.

Soli Deo Gloria,

J. A. O. Preus, Jr.

